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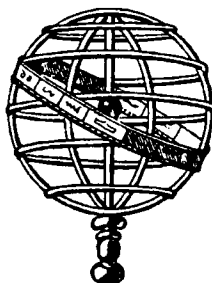


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PART I.

MEN OF STRAW.

I.

THERE is not, perhaps, in all Paris, a quieter street than the Rue St. Gilles in the Marais, within a few steps of the Place Royale. No carriages there ; never a crowd. Hardly is the silence broken by the regulation trumpet calls of the Caserne des Minimes, by the chimes of the church of St. Louis, or by the joyous clamours of the pupils of M. Massin's Academy during their play hours. At night, long before ten o'clock, and when the Boulevard Beaumarchais is still full of life, activity, and noise, everything is closed. One by one the lights go out, and the great windows with diminutive panes become dark. And if, after midnight, some belated citizen passes on his way home, he quickens his step, feeling lonely and uneasy, and apprehensive of the reproaches of his concierge, who may ask him whence he comes at so late an hour. In such a street, every one knows every one, the houses have no mystery, the families no secrets, it is like a small town, where idle curiosity has always a corner of its veil slyly raised, where gossip flourishes as rankly as the grass between the paving-stones.

Thus on the afternoon of Saturday, the 27th of April, 1872, a fact which anywhere else might have passed unnoticed, was attracting particular attention. A man some thirty years of age, wearing the working livery of servants of the upper classes,—the long striped waistcoat with sleeves, and the white linen apron,—was going from door to door. "Who can the man be looking for?" wondered the idle neighbours, closely watching his evolutions. He was not looking for any one. To the persons he spoke to, he stated that he had been sent by a cousin of his, an excellent cook, who, before taking a place in the neighbourhood, was anxious to have all possible information respecting her prospective masters. And then, "Do you know M. Vincent Favoral?" he would ask. Concierges and shop-keepers knew no one better ; for it was more than a quarter of a century before, that M. Vincent Favoral, the day after his wedding, had come to settle in the Rue St. Gilles ; and there his two children were born,—his son M. Maxence, his daughter Mademoiselle Gilberte. He occupied the second story of the

house No. 38,—one of those old-fashioned dwellings, such as they no longer build, now that ground is worth twelve hundred francs the metre, in which there is no stinting of space, in which the stairs, with their wrought-iron balusters, are wide and easy, the rooms large, and the ceilings twelve feet from the floor.

"Of course, we know M. Favoral," answered every one to the servant's questions; "and, if there ever was an honest man, why, he is certainly the one. There is a man whom you could trust with your savings, if you had any, without fear of his ever running off to Belgium with them." And it was further explained, that M. Favoral was chief cashier, and probably, also, one of the principal shareholders of the Mutual Credit Bank, one of those admirable financial institutions which sprung up with the second empire, and which first won heavily on the Bourse, the very day that the game of the "Coup d'Etat" was being played in the streets.

"I know well enough the gentleman's business," remarked the servant; "but what sort of a man is he? That's what my cousin would like to know."

The wine merchant at No. 43, the senior shop-keeper in the street, could best answer that question. A couple of glasses of cognac politely offered soon set his tongue going; and, after clinking glasses, he said, "M. Vincent Favoral is a man some fifty-two or three years old, but who looks much younger, not having yet a single gray hair. He is tall and thin, with neatly-trimmed whiskers, thin lips, and small yellow eyes. He is not at all talkative. It takes more trouble to get a word from his mouth than a franc from his pocket. 'Yes,' 'no,' 'good-morning,' 'good-evening;' that's about the extent of his conversation. Summer and winter, he wears gray trousers, a long frock-coat, laced-up shoes, and lisle-thread gloves. 'Pon my word, I should say that he is still wearing the very same clothes I saw upon his back for the first time in 1845, did I not know that he has two new suits made every year by the concierge at No. 29, who is also a tailor."

"Why, he must be an old miser," muttered the servant.

"He is above all peculiar," continued the shop-keeper, "like most men of figures, it seems. His own life is ruled and regulated like the pages of his ledger. In the neighbourhood he is called Old Punctuality; and, when he passes through the Rue St. Louis, which is now called the Rue Turenne, the merchants set their watches by him. Rain or shine, every morning of the year, on the stroke of nine, he appears at the door on the way to his office. When he returns, you may be sure it is between twenty and twenty-five minutes past five. At six he dines; at seven he goes to meet his friends at the Café Turc; at ten he returns home and goes to bed; and, at the first stroke of eleven at the church of St. Louis, out goes his candle."

"Hem!" grumbled the servant with a look of contempt, "the question is, Will my cousin be willing to live with a man who is a sort of walking clock?"

"It isn't always pleasant," remarked the wine-merchant; "and the best proof is, that the son, M. Maxence, got tired of it."

"He no longer lives with his parents then?"

"He dines with them; but he lives by himself in the Boulevard du Temple. The row caused a good deal of talk at the time; and some people pretend that M. Maxence is a young scamp, who leads a very dissipated life; but I consider that his father kept him too close. The boy is twenty

five, pretty good-looking, and has a very stylish mistress: I have seen her. I should have done just as he did."

"And the daughter, Mademoiselle Gilberte?"

"She does not seem to get married, although she is past twenty, and pretty as a rosebud. After the war, her father wanted her to marry a stock-broker, so they say, a very stylish man who always came in a carriage and pair; but she refused him outright. I should not be a bit surprised to hear that she has some love-affair of her own. I have lately noticed about here a young gentleman who looks up very much whenever he passes No. 38." The servant did not seem to find these particulars very interesting.

"It's the lady," he said, "that my cousin would like to know most about."

"Naturally. Well, you can safely tell her that she never will have had a better mistress. Poor Madame Favoral! She must have had a sweet time of it with her maniac of a husband! But she is no longer young; and people get accustomed to everything, you know. When the weather is fine, I see her pass with Mademoiselle Gilberte. They walk round the Place Royale. That's about their only amusement."

"The devil!" said the servant, with a sneer. "If the master doesn't treat them to any others, he won't ruin himself!"

"He does not pay for any others," continued the shop-keeper. "That is, excuse me, every Saturday, for many years, M. and Madame Favoral receive a few of their friends: M. and Madame Desclavettes, who used to deal in bronzes, in the Rue Turenne; M. Chapelain, the retired lawyer in the Rue St. Antoine, whose daughter is Mademoiselle Gilberte's particular friend; M. Desormeaux, who is one of the heads of department in the Ministry of Justice; and three or four others besides; and as this just happens to be a Saturday"—But here he stopped short, and pointing towards the street,—"Quick," said he "look! Speaking of the—you know— It is twenty minutes past five, there is M. Favoral coming home."

It was, in fact, the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank, looking very much indeed as the shop-keeper had depicted him. Walking with his head down, he seemed to be seeking about the pavement for the very spot upon which he had set his foot in the morning, that he might set it there again in the evening. With the same methodical step, he reached his house, walked up the two flights of stairs, and, taking out his pass-key, opened the door of his apartment. The dwelling was in keeping with the man; and everything, from the very ante-room, betrayed his peculiarities. There, evidently, every piece of furniture must have its invariable place, every object its irrevocable shelf or hook. All around were evidences, if not exactly of poverty, at least of small means, and of the artifices of a respectable economy. Cleanliness was carried to its utmost limits, everything shone, but there was not a detail but betrayed the industrious hand of the housekeeper, struggling to defend her furniture against the ravages of time. The velvet on the chairs was darned at the angles as with the needle of a fairy. Stitches of new worsted showed on the faded designs of the hearth-rugs. The curtains had been turned so as to display the side the least faded,

All the guests enumerated by the shop-keeper, and a few others besides, were in the drawing-room when M. Favoral entered. But, instead of returning their greeting, he asked: "Where is Maxence?"

"I am expecting him, my dear," replied Madame Favoral gently.

The cashier frowned, "Always behind time," he scolded. "It is too much."

His daughter, Mademoiselle Gilberte, interrupted him, saying, "Where is my bouquet, father?"

M. Favoral stopped short, struck his forehead, and with the accent of a man who reveals something incredible, prodigious, unheard of, "Forgotten," he exclaimed, scanning the syllables: "I have for-got-ten it!"

It was a fact. Every Saturday, on his way home, he was in the habit of stopping at an old woman's shop in front of the Church of St. Louis, and buying a bouquet for Mademoiselle Gilberte. "Ah! I have caught you this time, father!" cried the young girl.

Meantime Madame Favoral, leaning towards Madame Desclavettes, whispered in a troubled voice: "Really something serious must have happened to my husband. He to forget! he to fail in one of his habits! It is the first time in twenty-six years."

The appearance of Maxence at this moment prevented her from continuing. M. Favoral was about to administer a sound reprimand to his son, when dinner was announced.

"Come," exclaimed M. Chapelain, the ex-lawyer, a pre-eminently conciliating man,— "Come, let us adjourn to the dining-room."

They sat down to table; but Madame Favoral had scarcely helped the soup, when the door-bell rang violently. Directly after the servant appeared, and announced; "The Baron de Thaller!"

More pale than his napkin, the cashier stood up. "My chief," he stammered, "the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank."

Close upon the heels of the servant came M. de Thaller. Tall, thin, and stiff, he had a very small head, a flat face, pointed nose, and long reddish whiskers, slightly lightened with silvery threads, falling half-way down his chest. More careful of his person than a girl, he exhaled all sorts of perfumes. Dressed in the latest style he wore a loose overcoat of rough material, trousers that spread nearly to the tips of his boots, a large turn-down collar, with a light cravat which displayed an elegant diamond pin, and on his head a tall hat with fashionably turned brims. He blinkingly made a rapid estimate of the dining-room, of the shabby furniture, and of the guests seated around the table. Then, without even condescending to touch his hat, with his large hand tightly fitted into a lavender kid glove, in a brief and imperious tone, and with a slight Alsatian accent, he said to his cashier: "I must speak with you, Vincent, alone and at once."

M. Favoral made visible efforts to conceal his anxiety. "You see," he commenced, "we are dining with a few friends, and,—"

"Do you wish me to speak before them all?" harshly interrupted the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank.

The cashier hesitated no longer. Taking up a candle from the table, he opened the door leading to the drawing-room, and, standing respectfully on one side: "Be kind enough to enter, sir," said he: "I follow you." And, at the moment of disappearing himself, remarked to his guests with a last effort at self-control: "Continue to dine without me, I shall soon catch up with you. I shall be occupied but a moment. Do not be uneasy, in the least."

They were not uneasy, but surprised, and, above all, shocked at the manners of M. de Thaller. "What a brute!" muttered Madame Desclavettes. M. Desormeaux, the head of department at the Ministry of Justice sneered. He was an old legitimist, much imbued with reactionary ideas. "Such are our masters," said he, "the high barons of financial feudality. Ah! you were indignant at the arrogance of the old aristocracy; well, on your

knees ~~thru~~, on your bellies rather, before the golden crown on a gules' field." No one rejoined : every one was trying his best to hear what was said in the next room.

A discussion of the utmost violence was evidently going on between M. de Thaller and M. Favoral. To seize the meaning of it was impossible ; yet the upper panels of the door being of glass, fragments could be heard occasionally ; and from time to time such words as dividends and shareholders, deficit, and millions, distinctly reached the ear.

"What can it all mean ? great heaven !" moaned Madame Favoral.

Doubtless the two interlocutors, the manager and the cashier, had drawn nearer to the door of communication ; for their voices, which rose more and more, had now become very clear. "It is an infamous trap !" M. Favoral was saying. "I should have been notified—"

"Come, come," interrupted the other. "Were you not fully warned ? You know you were."

Fear, a fear vague still, and inexplicable, was slowly taking possession of the guests ; and they remained motionless, their forks in suspense, holding their breath.

"Never," M. Favoral was repeating, stamping his foot so violently that the partition shook,—"*never, never !*"

"And yet it will be so," declared M. de Thaller. "It is the only resource—"

"And suppose I will not !"

"What has your will to do with it ? You should have thought of that twenty years ago. But listen to me, let us reason a little." Here M. de Thaller lowered his voice ; and for some minutes nothing was heard in the dining-room, except confused words, and incomprehensible exclamations, until suddenly he resumed in a furious tone : "It is ruin, it is bankruptcy at the end of the month."

"Sir," the cashier was replying, "sir—"

"You are a forger, M. Vincent Favoral ; you are a thief !"

Maxence bounded from his seat. "I shall not permit my father to be thus insulted in his own house," he exclaimed.

"Maxence," begged Madame Favoral ; "my son !"

The ex-lawyer, M. Chapelain, held him back by the arm ; but he struggled hard, and was about to burst into the drawing-room, when the door opened, and the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank stepped out. With a coolness quite remarkable after such a scene, he advanced towards Mademoiselle Gilberte, and in a tone of offensive protection, said : "Your father is a wretch, mademoiselle, and my duty would be to deliver him at once into the hands of justice. On account of your worthy mother, however, of your brother, above all on your own account, mademoiselle, I shall forbear doing so. But let him fly, let him disappear, and never more be heard of."

He drew from his pocket a roll of bank-notes, and, throwing them on the table, added : "Hand him this. Let him leave this very night. The police may have been informed. A train leaves for Brussels at five minutes past eleven." And, having bowed, he withdrew, no one addressing a single word to him, so great was the astonishment of all the guests of that house until then so peaceful.

Overcome with stupor, Maxence had dropped upon his chair. Mademoiselle Gilberte alone retained some presence of mind. "It is a shame," she exclaimed, "for us to give up thus ! That man is an impostor, a villain ; he lies ! Father, father !"

M. Favoral had not waited to be called, and was standing up against the drawing-room door, pale as death, and yet calm. "Why attempt any explanations?" he said. "My safe is empty; and appearances are against me."

His wife had drawn near to him, and taken his hand. "The misfortune is immense," she murmured, "but not irreparable. We will sell everything we have."

"Have you not friends? Are we not here," insisted the others,—M. Desclavettes, M. Desormeaux, and M. Chapelain.

Gently he pushed his wife aside, and coldly said: "All we possessed would be as a grain of sand in an ocean. But we have no longer anything: we are all ruined."

"Ruined!" exclaimed M. Desormeaux, "ruined! And where are the forty-five thousand francs I placed in your charge?"

He made no reply.

"And our hundred and twenty thousand francs?" groaned M. and Madame Desclavettes.

"And my sixty thousand francs?" shouted M. Chapelain, with a blasphemous oath.

The cashier shrugged his shoulders. "Lost," he said, "irrevocably lost!"

Then their rage exceeded all bounds. Then they forgot that this unfortunate man had been their friend for twenty years, that they were his guests; and they commenced heaping upon him threats and insults without name. He did not even deign to defend himself. "Go on," he muttered, "go on. When a poor dog, carried away by the current, is drowning, men of heart cast stones at him from the bank. Go on!"

"You should have told us that you speculated," screamed M. Desclavettes.

On hearing these words, he drew himself up, and with a gesture so terrible that the others stepped back frightened. "What," said he, in a tone of crushing irony, "it is this evening only, that you discover that I speculated? Kind friends! Where, then, and in whose pockets, did you suppose I was getting the enormous interests I have been paying you for years? Where have you ever seen honest money, the money of labour, yield twelve or fourteen per cent? The money that yields that is the money of the gaming-table, the money of the Bourse. Why did you bring me your funds? Because you were fully satisfied that I knew how to handle the cards. Ah! If I was to tell you that I had doubled your capital, you would not ask me how I did it, nor whether I had stocked the cards. You would virtuously pocket the money. But I have lost, therefore I must be a thief. Well, so be it; but, then, you are all my accomplices. It is the avidity of the dupes which induces the trickery of the sharpers."

Here he was interrupted by the servant coming in. "Sir," she exclaimed excitedly, "Oh sir! the courtyard is full of police-agents. They are speaking to the concierge. They will be coming up stairs. I hear them!"

II.

ACCORDING to the time and place where they are uttered, there are words which acquire a terrible significance. In this disordered room, in the midst of these excited people, that one word, "police," sounded like a thunder-

clap. "Do not open," Maxence cried to the servant; "do not open, whether they ring or knock. Let them burst the door first."

The very excess of her fright restored to Madame Favoral a portion of her energy. Throwing herself before her husband as if to protect him, as if to defend him, she exclaimed: "They are coming to arrest you, Vincent. They are coming; do you not hear them?"

He remained motionless, his feet, so to say, riveted to the floor. "It was bound to be," he said. And with the accent of the wretch who sees all hope crushed, who gives up the struggle, and submits, he said, "Be it so; let them arrest me, and let all be over for good. I have had enough anxiety like that; I have tried too many impossible alternatives. I am tired of constantly feigning, deceiving, and lying. Let them arrest me! Any misfortune will be smaller in reality than the horrors of uncertainty. I have nothing more to fear now. For the first time in many years I shall sleep to-night." He did not notice the terrified looks of his guests. "You think I am a thief," he added; "well, be satisfied, justice shall be done!"

But he attributed to them sentiments which were no longer theirs. They had forgotten their frightful outburst of anger, and their bitter resentment for their lost money! The imminence of the peril awoke suddenly within them the memories of the past, and that strong affection which comes from long habit, and a constant exchange of services rendered. Whatever M. Favoral might have done, they only saw in him now the friend, the host whose bread they had broken together more than a hundred times, the man whose probity, up to this fatal night, had remained far above suspicion. Pale, excited, they crowded round him. "Have you lost your mind?" cried M. Desormeaux. "Are you going to wait to be arrested, thrown into prison, dragged into a criminal court?"

He shook his head, and in a tone of idiotic obstinacy, repeated: "Have I not told you that everything is against me? Let them come; let them do what they please with me."

"And your wife, unhappy man," insisted M. Chapelain, the ex-lawyer, "and your children!"

"Will they be any the less dishonored if I am condemned by default?"

Wild with grief, Madame Favoral was wringing her hands. "Vincent," she murmured, "in heaven's name spare us the harrowing agony of knowing you to be in prison."

Obstinately he remained silent. His daughter, Mademoiselle Gilberte, dropped upon her knees before him, her hands clasped together? "I beseech you, father," she begged.

He shuddered all over. An unspeakable expression of suffering and anguish contracted his features; and, speaking in a scarcely intelligible voice, he stammered: "Ah! you are cruelly protracting my agony. What do you ask of me?"

"You must fly," declared M. Desclavettes.

"Which way? How? Do you imagine that every precaution has not been taken, that every issue is not closely watched?"

Maxence interrupted him with a gesture, and said: "The windows in my sister's room, father, open on to the courtyard of the adjoining house."

"Yes; but we are on the second floor."

"No matter! I have a way." And, turning towards his sister, the young man added: "Come, Gilberte, give me a light, and let me have some sheets."

They hurried out. Madame Favoral felt a gleam of hope. "We are saved!" she exclaimed.

"Saved!" repeated the cashier mechanically.

"Yes; for I guess Maxence's idea. But we must have an understanding. Where will you take refuge?"

"How can I tell?"

"There is a train at five minutes past eleven," remarked M. Desormeaux. "Don't let us forget that."

"But money will be required to leave by that train," interrupted M. Chapelain. "Fortunately, I have some." And, forgetting his hundred and sixty thousand francs lost, he took out his pocket-book. Madame Favoral stopped him. "We have more than we need," said she. She took from the table, and held out to her husband, the roll of bank-notes which the director of the Mutual Credit Bank had thrown there before going.

He refused them with a gesture of rage. "Rather starve to death!" he exclaimed. "'Tis he, 'tis that wretch—" But he interrupted himself, and said more gently: "Hide those notes, and let Maxence take them back to M. de Thaller to-morrow."

The bell rang violently. "The police!" moaned Madame Desclavettes, who seemed on the point of fainting away,

"I will go and negotiate," said M. Desormeaux. "Fly, Vincent, do not lose a minute." And he ran to the door of the apartments, whilst Madame Favoral hurried her husband towards Mademoiselle Gilberte's room.

Rapidly and stoutly Maxence had fastened four sheets together by the ends, which gave a more than sufficient length. Then, he opened the window, and carefully examined the courtyard of the adjoining house. "No one," said he: "everybody is at dinner. We shall succeed."

M. Favoral tottered like a drunken man. A terrible emotion convulsed his features. Casting a long look upon his wife and children: "O Lord!" he murmured, "what will become of them?"

"Fear nothing, father," uttered Maxence. "I am here. Neither my mother nor my sister will want for anything."

"My son!" resumed the cashier, "my children!" Then, with a choking voice, he added: "I am worthy neither of your love nor of your devotion, wretch that I am! I have made you lead a miserable existence, spend a joyless youth. I forced upon you all the wretchedness of poverty; whilst I—And now I leave you nothing but ruin and a dishonoured name."

"Make haste, father," interrupted Mademoiselle Gilberte.

It seemed as if he could not make up his mind. "It is horrible to abandon you thus," he continued. "What a parting! Ah! death would indeed be far preferable. What will you think of me? I am very guilty, certainly, but not as you think. I have been deceived, and I must suffer for all. If at least you knew the truth! But will you ever know it? We will never see each other again!"

Desperately his wife clung to him; "Do not speak thus," she said. "Wherever you may find an asylum, I will join you. Death alone should separate us. What do I care what you may have done, or what the world will say? I am your wife. Our children will come with me. If necessary, we will go to America; we will change our name; we will work."

The knocks on the outer door were becoming louder and louder; and M. Desormeaux's voice could be heard, endeavouring to gain a few moments more. "Come," said Maxence, "you must not hesitate any longer." And, overcoming his father's reluctance, he fastened one end of the sheets around his waist. "I am going to let you down, father," he exclaimed; "and, as soon as you touch the ground, you must undo the knot. Take care of the

first floor windows ; beware too of the concierge : and, once in the street, don't walk too fast. Make for the Boulevards, where you will be sooner lost in the crowd."

The knocks had now become violent blows ; and it was evident that the door would soon be broken in, if M. Desormeaux did not make up his mind to open it. The light was put out. With the assistance of his daughter, M. Favoral lifted himself upon the window-sill, whilst Maxence held the sheets with both hands. "I beseech you, Vincent," again begged Madame Favoral, "write to us. I shall die if I do not soon know you are in safety."

Maxence let the sheets slip slowly ; in two seconds M. Favoral stood on the pavement below. "All right," he said. The young man drew the sheets back rapidly, and threw them under the bed. But Mademoiselle Gilberte remained long enough at the window to recognise her father's voice calling to the concierge to pull the cord that opened the street door, and to hear it close behind him. "Saved !" she cried.

It was none too soon. M. Desormeaux had just been compelled to yield ; and the commissary of police was walking in.

III.

THE commissaries of police of Paris, as a rule, are no simpletons ; and, if they are ever taken in, it is because it has suited them to be taken in. Their modest title covers perhaps the most important of magistracies, almost the only one known to the lower classes ; an enormous power, and an influence so decisive, that the most sensible statesman of the reign of Louis Philippe dared once to say from the tribune of the chamber, "Give me twenty good commissaries of police in Paris, and I will do away with the entire government : net profit, one hundred millions." Parisian above all, the commissary has had ample time to study his ground when he was yet only a police officer. The dark side of the most brilliant lives has no longer any mysteries for him. He has received the strangest confidences : he has listened to the most astounding confessions. He knows how low humanity can stoop, and what aberrations there are in brains apparently the soundest. The workwoman whom her husband beats, and the great lady whom her husband robs, have both applied to him. He has been sent for by the shop-keeper whom his wife deceives, and by the millionaire who has been blackmailed. To his office, as to a lay confessional, all passions fatally lead. It is there that the dirty linen of two millions of people is washed amongst themselves. A Paris commissary of police, who, after ten years' practice, could retain an illusion, believe anything in the world, or be astonished at no matter what, would be but a fool. If he is still capable of some feeling, he is a good man. The one who presented himself at M. Favoral's apartments, was already past middle age, colder than ice, and yet kindly, but of that commonplace kindness which frightens one like the executioner's politeness when on the scaffold. He required but a single glance of his small clear eyes to decipher the physiognomies of all these worthy people standing around the disordered table. And signing to his subordinates to remain at the door, he said, "M. Vincent Favoral ?"

The cashier's guests, M. Desormeaux excepted, seemed stricken with stupor. Each one felt as if he had a share of the disgrace of this police invasion. The dupes who are sometimes caught in gambling hells have the same humiliated attitudes. At last, and not without an effort, M. Chapelain, the ex lawyer, replied :—"M. Favoral is no longer here."

The commissary of police started. Whilst they were parleying with him, he had perfectly well understood that they were only trying to gain time, and, if he had not at once burst in the door, it was solely owing to his respect for M. Desormeaux, whom he knew personally, as one of the heads of department at the Ministry of Justice. But his suspicions did not extend beyond the destruction of a few compromising papers. Whereas, in fact,—“You have helped M. Favoral to escape, gentlemen?” said he. No one replied. “Your silence is an avowal,” he added. “Very well, which way did he get off?” Still no answer. M. Desclavettes would have been glad to add something more to the forty-five thousand francs he had just heard he had lost, to be, together with Madame Desclavettes, a hundred miles away. “Where is Madame Favoral?” resumed the commissary, evidently well informed. “Where are Mademoiselle Gilberte and M. Maxence Favoral?” Still no reply. No one in the dining-room knew what had taken place in the bedchamber; and a single word might betray their friend. The commissary at last became impatient. “Bring a light,” said he to his men, who had remained at the door, “and follow me. We shall soon see.” And without a shadow of hesitation, for, the same as robbers, members of the police seem to have the privilege of being everywhere at home, he crossed the drawing-room and reached Mademoiselle Gilberte’s bedchamber, just as she was withdrawing from the window. “Ah, so that’s the way he escaped!” he exclaimed. He rushed to the window and peered out long enough to thoroughly examine the ground, and understand the situation of the apartment. “It’s evident,” he said at last, “this window opens on the courtyard of the next house.” This was said to one of his agents, who bore an unmistakable resemblance to the servant who had been asking all those questions in the afternoon. “Instead of gathering so much useless information,” he added, “why did you not acquaint yourself with the outlets of the house?”

He was “sold”; and yet he manifested neither spite nor anger. He seemed in no wise anxious to run after the fugitive. Upon the features of Maxence and of Mademoiselle Gilberte, and more still in Madame Favoral’s eyes, he had read that it would be useless for the present. “We will at least examine his papers then,” said he.

“My husband’s papers are all in his study,” replied Madame Favoral.

“Please lead me to it, madame.”

The apartment which M. Favoral so pompously called his study was a small room with a tile floor and whitewashed walls, and was meanly lighted through a narrow transom. The furniture consisted of an old-writing table, a small cupboard, a few shelves upon which were piled some portfolios and bundles of old newspapers, and two or three deal chairs. “Where are the keys?” inquired the commissary of police.

“My father always carries them in his pocket, sir,” replied Maxence.

“Fetch a locksmith.”

Stronger than fear, curiosity had attracted all the guests of the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank, M. Desormeaux, M. Chapelain, M. Desclavettes himself; and standing by the door, they followed eagerly every motion of the commissary, who, pending the arrival of the locksmith, was making a flying examination of the bundles of papers left upon the writing table. After a while, and unable to contain himself any longer, the old bronze merchant timidly inquired, “Would it be indiscreet to ask the nature of the charges against poor Favoral?”

“Embezzlement, sir.”

"And is the amount large?"

"Had it been small, I should have said theft. Embezzlement commences only when the amount has reached certain proportions."

Annoyed at the sardonic tone of the commissary, M. Chapelain resumed: "The fact is, Favoral was our friend, and if, by joining together and each contributing something we could get him out of the scrape—"

"It's a matter of ten or twelve millions, gentlemen!"

Was it possible? Was it even likely? Could any one imagine so many millions slipping through the fingers of M. de Thaller's methodic cashier. "Ah, sir!" exclaimed Madame Favoral, "if anything could relieve my feelings, the enormity of the sum would! My husband was a man of simple and modest tastes—"

The commissary shook his head. "There are certain passions," he interrupted, "which nothing betrays externally. Gambling is more terrible than fire. After a conflagration, some charred remnants at least are found. What is there left after a lost game? Fortunes may be thrown into the vortex of the Bourse, without a trace of them being left."

The unfortunate woman was not convinced. "I could swear, sir," she protested, "that I knew how my husband spent every hour of his life."

"Do not swear, madame."

"All our friends will tell you how parsimonious my husband was."

"Here madame, towards yourself and your children, I believe it, in fact I see it; but elsewhere?"

He was interrupted by the arrival of the locksmith, who, in a couple of minutes, had picked all the locks of the old writing-table. But in vain did the commissary search all the drawers. He found only those useless papers which become relics for those people who have made order their religious faith,—uninteresting letters, grocers' and butchers' bills running back twenty years. "It is a waste of time to look for anything here," he growled. And in fact he was about to give up his perquisitions, when a bundle thinner than the rest attracted his attention. He cut the thread that bound it; and almost at once, exclaimed, "I was sure of it." Then holding out a paper to Madame Favoral, he added, "Read that, madame, if you please."

It was a bill. She read thus:—

"Sold to M. Favoral a Cashmere shawl, fr. 8,500.

Received payment, FORBE & TOWLER.

"Was it for you, madame," asked the commissary, "that this magnificent shawl was bought?"

Though greatly astonished, the poor woman still refused to admit the evidence. "Madame de Thaller spends a great deal," she stammered. "My husband often made important purchases on her account."

"Often, indeed!" interrupted the commissary of police; "for here are many other receipted bills,—ear-rings, sixteen thousand francs; a bracelet, three thousand francs; a drawing-room suite, a horse, two velvet dresses. Here is, at least, a part, though not the whole, of the ten millions."

IV.

HAD the commissary received any information in advance? or was he guided only by the instinct peculiar to men of his profession, and the habit of suspecting everything, even that which seems most unlikely? At any rate, he expressed himself in a tone of absolute certainty. The agents who had accompanied and who assisted him in his researches were winking at each other, and giggling stupidly. The situation struck them as rather amusing. The others, M. Desclavettes, M. Chapelain, and the worthy M. Desormeaux himself, would have vainly racked their brains to find terms wherein to express the immensity of their astonishment. Vincent Favoral, their old friend, paying for cashmere shawls, diamonds, and drawing-room suites! Such an idea could not find place in their minds. For whom could such princely gifts be intended? For a mistress, for one of those formidable creatures whom fancy represents crouching in the depths of love, like monsters in their dens! But how could any one imagine the methodic cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank carried away by one of those insane passions which no longer reason? Ruined by gambling, perhaps, but by a woman! . . . Could any one picture him, so homely and so plain here, Rue St. Gilles, at the head of another establishment, elsewhere, and leading in one of the brilliant quarters of Paris, a reckless life, such as strike terror in the bosoms of quiet families? Could any one understand the same man at once miserly-economical and madly-prodigious, storming when his wife spent a few centimes, and robbing to supply the shameful luxuries of an adventuress; collecting in the same drawer the jeweller's receipts and the butcher's tickets?

"It is the climax of absurdity," murmured the excellent M. Desormeaux. Maxence fairly shook with wrath. Mademoiselle Gilberte had dropped on to a chair near the writing-table, and was weeping. Madame Favoral, usually so timid, alone boldly defended, and with her utmost energy, the man whose name she bore. That he might have embezzled millions, she admitted. That he had deceived and betrayed her so shamefully, that he had made such a wretched dupe of her for so many years, seemed to her insensate, monstrous, impossible. "Your suspicions would vanish at once, sir," said she, purple with shame, to the commissary, "if you would allow me to explain to you our mode of life."

Encouraged by his first discovery, he was proceeding more minutely with his perquisitions, undoing the strings of every bundle. "It is useless, madame," he answered in that brief tone which made so much impression upon M. Desclavettes. "You can only tell me what you know; and you know nothing."

"Never, sir, did a man lead a more regular life than M. Favoral."

"In appearance, you are right. Besides, to regulate one's disorder is one of the peculiarities of our time. We open credits to our passions, and we keep an account of our infamies by double entry. We operate methodically. We embezzle millions that we may hang diamonds to the ears of some young person; but we are careful, and we keep the receipted bills."

"But, sir, I have already told you that I never lost sight of my husband—"

"Of course.

"Every morning, precisely at nine o'clock, he left home to go to M. de Thaller's office."

"The whole neighbourhood knows that, madame."

"At half-past five he returned home."

"That, also, is a well-known fact."

"In the evening, after his dinner, he went out to his café, but it was his only amusement; and he was always in bed by eleven o'clock."

"Perfectly correct."

"Well, then, sir, where could M. Favoral have found time to abandon himself to the excesses of which you accuse him?"

Imperceptibly the commissary of police shrugged his shoulders. "Far from me, madame," said he, "to doubt your good faith. What matters, moreover, the way in which your husband spent the sums which he is charged with having appropriated? But what do your arguments prove? Simply that M. Favoral was very skilful, and very self-possessed. Had he breakfasted when he left you at nine? No. Where then, pray, did he breakfast? In a restaurant? Which? Why did he only come home at half-past five, when his office actually closed at three o'clock? Are you quite sure that it was to the Café Turc that he went every evening? Finally, why do you not say anything of the extra work which he always had to attend to, as he pretended, once or twice a month? Sometimes it was a loan, sometimes a liquidation, or a settlement of dividends, which devolved upon him. Did he come home then? No. He told you that he would dine out, and that it would be more convenient for him to have a bed made up in his office; and thus you were twenty-four or forty-eight hours without seeing him. Surely this double existence must have weighed heavily upon him; but he was forbidden from breaking off with you, under penalty of being caught the very next day with his hand in the till. It is the respectability of his life here which made the other possible,—the one which has absorbed such enormous sums. The harsher and the closer he was here, the more magnificent he could show himself elsewhere. His household in the Rue St. Gilles was for him a certificate of impunity. Seeing him so economical, every one thought him rich. People who seem to spend nothing are always trusted. Every privation which he imposed upon you increased his reputation of austere probity, and raised him farther above suspicion—"

Big tears were rolling down Madame Favoral's cheeks. "Why not tell me the whole truth?" she stammered.

"Because I do not know it," replied the commissary; "because these are all mere presumptions. I have seen so many instances of similar calculations!" Then regretting, perhaps, to have said so much, he added, "But I may be mistaken, I do not pretend to be infallible." He was just then completing a brief inventory of all the papers found in the old writing-table. There was nothing left to examine but the drawer which was used as a sort of till. He found in it, in gold, notes, and small change, seven hundred and eighteen francs. Having counted this sum, the commissary offered it to Madame Favoral, saying, "This belongs to you, madame."

But instinctively she withdrew her hand. "Never!" she said.

The commissary added with a kindly look: "I understand your scruples, madame, and yet I must insist. You may believe me when I

tell you that this little sum is legitimately yours. You have no personal fortune?"

The efforts of the poor woman to keep from bursting into loud sobs were but too visible. "I possess nothing in the world, sir," she replied, in a broken voice. "My husband alone attended to our business-affairs. He never spoke to me about them; and I would not have dared to question him. Alone he disposed of the money. Every Sunday he handed me the amount which he thought necessary for the week's expenses, and I rendered him an account of it. When my children or myself were in need of anything, I told him so, and he gave me what he thought proper. This is Saturday: of what I received last Sunday I have five francs left: that is our whole fortune."

Positively the commissary was moved. "You see, then, madame," he observed, "that you ought not to hesitate. You must live."

Maxence stepped forward. "Am I not here, sir?" he asked.

The commissary looked at him keenly, and replied in a grave tone,— "I believe indeed, sir, that you will not allow your mother and sister to want for anything. But resources are not created in a day. Your own, if I have not been deceived, are more than limited just now." And as the young man blushed, and did not answer, he handed the seven hundred francs to Mademoiselle Gilberte, saying,— "Take these, mademoiselle: your mother permits it."

His work was done. To place his seals upon M. Favoral's study was the work of a moment. Motioning, then, to his subordinates to withdraw, and being ready to leave himself, he said to Madame Favoral: "Do not let the seals cause you any uneasiness, madame. Before forty-eight hours are passed, some one will come to remove these papers, and restore to you the free use of this room."

"Well!" exclaimed M. Desormeaux, as soon as the commissary had gone out, and the door closed behind him.

But no one had anything to say. The guests were making haste to leave the house where misfortune had just entered. The catastrophe was certainly terrible and unforeseen; but did it not reach them too? Did they not lose among them more than three hundred thousand francs? Thus, after a few commonplace protestations, and some of those promises which mean nothing, they withdrew; and, as they were going down the stairs, M. Desormeaux remarked,— "The commissary took Vincent's escape too quietly. He must know some way to catch him again."

V.

At last Madame Favoral found herself alone with her children, and free to give way to the most frightful despair. She dropped heavily upon a seat; and, drawing Maxence and Gilberte to her bosom, "O my children!" she sobbed, covering them with her kisses and her tears, "my children, we are most unfortunate!"

Not less distressed than herself, they strove, nevertheless, to mitigate her anguish, to inspire her with sufficient courage to bear this crushing trial; and kneeling at her feet, and kissing her hands, they kept repeating: "Are we not left you, mother?"

But she did not seem to hear them, and continued,— "It is not for myself that I weep. I! what had I to wait or hope for in life? Whilst you,

Maxence, you, my poor Gilberte ! If, at least, I was blameless ! But no. It is my weakness and my want of courage that have brought on this catastrophe. I shrank from the struggle. I purchased my domestic peace at the cost of your future. I forgot that a mother has sacred duties towards her children."

Madame Favoral was at this time a woman of some forty-three years, with delicate and mild features, a countenance overflowing with kindness, and whose whole being exhaled, as it were, an exquisite perfume of noblesse and distinction. Happy, she might have been beautiful still, of that autumnal beauty whose maturity has the splendours of the luscious fruits of the later season. But she had suffered so much ! The livid paleness of her complexion, the rigid fold of her lips, the nervous shudders that shook her frame, revealed a whole existence of bitter deceptions, of exhausting struggles, and of proudly concealed humiliations. And yet everything seemed to smile upon her at the outset of life. She was an only daughter ; and her parents, wealthy silk-merchants, had brought her up like the daughter of an archduchess, destined to marry some foreign prince. But at fifteen she had lost her mother. Her father, soon tired of his lonely fireside, commenced to seek away from home some diversion from his sorrow. He was a weak-minded man, one of those to play the part of eternal dupes. Having money, he found many friends. Having once tasted the cup of facile pleasures, he yielded readily to its intoxication. He amused himself, he supped, he gambled, to the utter detriment of his business. And eighteen months after his wife's death, he had already squandered a large portion of his fortune, when he fell into the hands of an adventuress, whom, without regard for his daughter, he audaciously installed beneath his own roof. In the country, where everybody knows everybody else, such infamies are almost impossible. They are not quite so rare in Paris, where one is, so to speak, lost in the crowd, and where the restraining power of the neighbour's opinion is lacking. For two years the poor girl, condemned to live with this illegitimate stepmother, endured nameless sufferings.

She had just completed her eighteenth year, when, one evening, her father took her aside, and said,—“I have made up my mind to marry again, but I wish first to provide you with a husband. Having looked for one, I have found him. He is not very brilliant perhaps ; but he is, it seems, a good, hard-working, economical fellow, who'll make his way in the world. I had dreamed of something better for you, but times are hard, trade is bad ; in short, having only a dowry of twenty thousand francs to give you, I have no right to be very particular. To-morrow, I'll bring you my candidate.” And, sure enough, the next day that excellent father introduced M. Vincent Favoral to his daughter. She was not pleased with him ; but she dared not have said that she was displeased. He was, at the age of twenty-five, which he had just reached, a man so utterly lacking in individuality, that he could scarcely have excited any feeling either of sympathy or aversion. Suitably dressed, he seemed timid and awkward, reserved, very diffident, and of mediocre intelligence. He confessed to have received a most imperfect education, and declared himself quite ignorant of life. He had scarcely any means outside his profession. He was at that time chief accountant in a large factory of the Faubourg St. Antoine, with a salary of four thousand francs a year. The young girl did not hesitate a moment. Anything appeared to her preferable to the incessant contact of a woman whom she abhorred and despised. She gave her consent ; and, twenty days after the first interview, she became Madame Favoral. Alas !

six weeks had not elapsed. before she knew that she had but exchanged her wretched fate for a more wretched one still. Not that her husband was in any way unkind to her (he dared not, as yet); but he had revealed himself enough to enable her to judge him. He was one of those formidably selfish men who wither everything around them, like those trees within the shadow of which nothing can grow. His coldness concealed a stupid obstinacy; his mildness, an iron will. If he had married, it was because he thought a wife a necessary adjunct, because he desired a home wherein to command, because, above all, he had been seduced by the dowry of twenty thousand francs.

For the man had one passion,—money. Under his placid countenance revolved thoughts of the most burning covetousness. He wished to be rich. Now, as he had no illusion whatever upon his own merits, as he knew himself to be perfectly incapable of any of those daring conceptions which lead to rapid fortune, as he was in no wise enterprising, he conceived but one means to achieve wealth, and that was, to save, to economise, to stint himself, to pile sou upon sou. His profession of accountant had furnished him with a number of instances of the financial power of the sou daily saved, and invested so as to yield its maximum of interest. If ever his blue eye became animated, it was when he calculated what would be at the present time the capital produced by a single sou placed at five per cent interest the year of the birth of our Saviour. For him this was sublime. He conceived nothing beyond. One sou! He wished, he said, he could have lived eighteen hundred years to follow the evolutions of that sou, to see it grow ten-fold, a hundred-fold, produce, swell, enlarge, and become, after centuries, millions and hundreds of millions. In spite of all, he had, during the early months of his marriage, allowed his wife to have a young servant. He gave her, from time to time, a five-franc-piece, and took her into the country on Sundays. This was the honeymoon; and, as he declared himself, this life of prodigalities could not last. Under a futile pretext, the little servant was dismissed. He tightened his purse-strings. The Sunday excursions were suppressed. To mere economy succeeded the niggardly parsimony which counts the grains of salt in a stew, which weighs the soap for the washing, and measures the evening's allowance of candle.

Gradually the accountant took the habit of treating his young wife like a servant, whose honesty is suspected; or like a child, whose thoughtlessness is to be feared. Every morning he handed her the money for the expenses of the day; and every evening he expressed his surprise that she had not made better use of it. He accused her of allowing herself to be grossly cheated, or even to be in collusion with the tradespeople. He charged her with being foolishly extravagant; which fact, however, he added, did not surprise him much on the part of the daughter of a man who had dissipated a large fortune. To cap the climax, Vincent Favoral was on the worst possible terms with his father-in-law. Of the twenty thousand francs of his wife's dowry, twelve thousand only had been paid, and it was in vain that he clamoured for the balance. The silk-merchant's business had become unprofitable; he was on the verge of bankruptcy. The eight thousand francs seemed in imminent danger. His wife alone he held responsible for this deception. He repeated to her constantly that she had connived with her father to "take him in," to fleece him, to ruin him. What an existence! Certainly, had the unhappy woman known where to find a refuge, she would have fled from that home where each of her days was but a protracted torture. But where could she go? Of whom could she beg a shelter? She had terrible temptations at this time, when she was not yet

twenty, and everybody called her the beautiful Madame Favoral. Perhaps she would have succumbed, had she not discovered that she was about to become a mother. One year, day for day, after her marriage, she gave birth to a son, who received the name of Maxence.

The accountant was but indifferently pleased at the coming of this son. It was, above all, a cause of expense. He had been compelled to give some thirty francs to a nurse, and almost twice as much for the baby's clothes. Then a child breaks up the regularity of one's habits; and he, as he affirmed, was attached to his as much as to life itself. And now he saw his household disturbed, the hours of his meals altered, his own importance reduced, his authority, even, ignored. But what mattered now to his young wife the ill-humour which he no longer took the trouble to conceal? A mother, she defied her tyrant. Now, at least, she had in this world a being upon whom she could lavish all her caresses so brutally repelled. There existed a soul within which she reigned supreme. What troubles would not a smile of her son have made her forget? With the admirable instinct of an egotist, M. Favoral understood so well what passed in the mind of his wife, that he dared not complain too much of what the little fellow cost. He made up his mind bravely; and even, when four years later, his daughter Gilberte was born, instead of lamenting, he said, "Bah! God blesses large families."

VI.

BUT already, at this epoch, M. Vincent Favoral's situation had been singularly modified. The revolution of 1848 had just taken place. The factory in the Faubourg St. Antoine, where he was employed, had been compelled to close its doors. One evening, as he came home to dinner at the usual hour, he announced that he had just been discharged. Madame Favoral shuddered at the thought of what her husband might be, without work, and deprived of his salary. "What is to become of us?" she murmured.

He shrugged his shoulders. Visibly he was much excited. His cheeks were flushed; his eyes sparkled. "Bah!" he said: "we shan't starve for all that." And as his wife was gazing at him in astonishment, "Well," he went on, "what are you looking at? It is so. I know many a one who affects to live on his income, who is not as well off as we are."

It was the first time during the six years he had been married, that he spoke of his business otherwise than to groan and complain, to accuse fate, and curse the high price of living. The very day before, he had declared himself ruined by the purchase of a pair of shoes for Maxence. The change was so sudden and so great, that his wife hardly knew what to think, and wondered if grief at the loss of his situation had not somewhat disturbed his mind. "Such are women," he went on with a sneer. "Results astonish them, because they know nothing of the means used to bring them about. Am I a fool, then? Would I impose upon myself privations of all sorts, if it were to accomplish nothing? Zounds! I love fine living too, I do, and good dinners at the restaurant; and going to the theatre, and nice little excursions in the country. But I want to be rich. At the price of all the comforts which I have not had, I have saved a capital, the interest on which will support us all. Ah! That's the power of the little sou put out to fatten!"

As she went to bed that night, Madame Favoral felt more happy than she ever had done since her mother's death. She almost forgave her hus-

band his sordid parsimony, and the humiliations he had heaped upon her. "Well be it so," she thought. "I shall have lived miserably, I shall have endured nameless sufferings; but my children will be rich, their life will be easy and pleasant."

The next day M. Favoral's excitement had completely abated. Manifestly, he regretted his confidences. "You must not think on that account that you can waste and pillage everything," he declared rudely. "Besides I have greatly exaggerated." And he started in search of a situation.

To find one was likely to be difficult. The morrow of a revolution is not exactly propitious to industry. Whilst the deputies quarrelled in the Chamber, there were on the street twenty thousand clerks, who wondered, every morning as they rose, where they would dine that day. For want of anything better, Vincent Favoral undertook to keep the books of various people; an hour here, an hour there, twice a week in one house, four times in another. In this way he earned as much and more than he did at the factory; but the business did not suit him. What he liked was the office from which one does not stir, the stove-heated atmosphere, the elbow-worn desk, the leather-cushioned chair, the black alpaca sleeves that one puts on to save the coat. The idea that he should on one and the same day have to do with five or six different houses, and be compelled to walk an hour, to go and work another hour at the other end of Paris, fairly irritated him. He found himself out of his reckoning, like a horse who has turned a mill for ten years would, if he were made to trot straight before him. So, one morning, he gave up the whole thing, swearing that he would rather remain idle until he could find a place suited to his taste and his convenience; and in the meantime, all they would have to do would be to put a little less butter on the bread, and a little more water in the wine. He went out, nevertheless, and remained until dinner-time. And he did the same the next and the following days. He started off the moment he had swallowed the last mouthful of his breakfast, came home at six o'clock, dined in haste, disappeared again, not to return until about midnight. He had hours of delirious joy, and moments of frightful discouragement. Sometimes he seemed horribly uneasy. "What can he be doing?" thought Madame Favoral. She ventured to ask him the question one morning, when he was in a good temper.

"Well," he answered, "am I not the master? I am operating at the Bourse, that's all!"

He could hardly have owned to anything that would have frightened the poor woman as much. "Are you not afraid," she objected, "to lose all we have so painfully accumulated? We have our children—"

He did not allow her to proceed. "Do you take me for a baby?" he exclaimed: "or do I look to you like a man so easy to be duped? Take care to economise in your household expenses, and don't meddle with my business."

And he continued. And he must have been lucky in his operations; for he had never been so pleasant at home. All his ways had changed. He had had clothes made at a first-class tailor's, and was evidently trying to look elegant. He gave up his pipe, and only smoked cigars. He got tired of giving every morning the money for the house, and got into the habit of handing it to his wife every week, on Sunday. A mark of vast confidence, as he observed to her the first time he gave it. "Be careful," he added, "that you don't find yourself penniless by Thursday." He became also more communicative. Often during the dinner, he would tell her what he

had heard during the day, anecdotes and gossip. He enumerated the persons with whom he had spoken. He named a number of people whom he called his friends, and whose names Madame Favoral carefully stored away in her memory.

There was one especially, who seemed to inspire him with a profound respect, a boundless admiration, and of whom he never tired of talking. He was, said he, a man of his age, M. de Thaller, the Baron de Thaller. "He," he kept repeating, "is really sharp; he is rich, he has ideas, he'll go far. It would be a great piece of luck if I could get him to do something for me!" Until at last one day, he asked his wife, "Your parents were very rich once, were they not?"

"I have heard say they were," she answered.

"They spent a good deal of money, I suppose? They had friends; they gave dinner-parties."

"Yes, they received a good deal of company."

"You remember that time?"

"Certainly I do."

"So that if I should take a fancy to receive some one here, some one of note, you would know how to do things properly so that we should not be laughed at?"

"I think so."

He remained silent for a moment, like a man who thinks before taking an important decision, and then said,—"I intend to invite a few people to dinner."

Madame Favoral could scarcely believe her ears. He had never received at his table any one but a fellow-clerk at the factory, named Desclavettes, who had just married the daughter of a dealer in bronzes, and succeeded to his business. "Is it possible!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, it is. The question now is, how much would a first-class dinner cost, allowing the best of everything?"

"That depends upon the number of guests."

"Say three or four persons."

The poor woman set herself to calculating diligently for some time; and then said timidly, for the sum seemed formidable to her, "I think that with a hundred francs—"

Her husband commenced whistling. "You'll need that for the wines alone," he interrupted. "Do you take me for a fool? But there, don't let us go into figures. Do as your parents did when they did the best; and, if it's well, I shall not complain of the expense. Secure a good cook, hire a waiter who understands his business well."

She was utterly confounded; and yet she was not at the end of her surprises. Soon M. Favoral declared that their crockery was not presentable, and that he must buy a new set. He discovered a hundred purchases to be made, and swore that he would make them. He even hesitated a moment about renewing the drawing-room furniture, although it was in very good condition, and was a present from his father-in-law. And, having finished his inventory, he asked his wife: "And you, what dress will you wear?"

"I have my black silk dress—"

He stopped her, saying, "That is to say that you have none at all. Very well. You must go this very day and get yourself one, a very handsome, a magnificent one; and you'll send it to a fashionable dressmaker to do up. And at the same time you had better get some little costumes for Maxence and Gilberte. Here are a thousand francs."

"Whoever are you going to invite, then?" she asked, completely bewildered.

"The Baron and the Baroness de Thaller," he replied with an emphasis full of conviction. "So try and distinguish yourself. Our fortune is at stake."

VII.

THAT this dinner was a matter of considerable import, Madame Favoral could not doubt when she saw her husband's fabulous liberality continue without flinching for a number of days. Ten times of an afternoon would he come home to tell his wife the name of some dish that had been mentioned before him, or to consult her on the subject of some exotic fruits he had just noticed in a shop-window. He constantly brought home wines of the most fantastic growths, those wines which dealers manufacture for the special use of verdant fools, and which they sell in odd-shaped bottles previously besmeared with secular dust and cobwebs. He subjected the cook whom Madame Favoral had engaged, to a most protracted cross-examination, and demanded that she should enumerate the houses where she had cooked. He positively required the man who was to wait at the table to show him the dress-coat he intended wearing. The great day having arrived, he did not stir from the house, going and coming from the kitchen to the dining-room, uneasy, agitated, unable to keep in one place. He breathed only when he had seen the table set and loaded with the new dinner-service he had purchased and the massive silver spoons and forks he had gone to hire in person. And when his young wife made her appearance, looking lovely in her new dress, and leading by the hands the two children, Maxence and Gilberte in their little costumes, he exclaimed, highly delighted, "Now that's perfect. Nothing could be better. Our four guests can come!"

They arrived a few minutes before seven, in two carriages, the magnificence of which astonished the Rue St. Gilles. And, the introductions over, Vincent Favoral had at last the ineffable satisfaction of seeing the Baron and Baroness de Thaller, M. Saint-Pavin, who called himself a financial editor, and M. Jules Jottras, of the firm of Jottras Brothers, seated at his table. It was with eager curiosity that Madame Favoral watched these people whom her husband called his friends, and whom she saw herself for the first time.

M. de Thaller, who could not then have been much over thirty, was already a man without any particular age. Cold, stiff, aping evidently the English style, he expressed himself in brief sentences, and with a strong foreign accent. Nothing to surprise on his countenance. He had a prominent forehead, dull blue eyes, and a very narrow nose. His scanty hair was spread over the top of his head with laboured symmetry; and his thick and carefully-trimmed red beard seemed to engross much of his attention.

M. Saint-Pavin had not the same stiff manner. He was careless in his dress, and lacked breeding. He was a robust fellow, dark and bearded, with thick lips, and bright and prominent eyes; he spread upon the tablecloth his broad hands ornamented at the joints with small tufts of hair; he talked loud, laughed noisily, ate much, and drank more. By his side, M. Jules Jottras, although looking like a fashion-plate, did not show to much advantage. Delicate, blonde, sallow, almost beardless, M. Jules

Jottras distinguished himself only by a sort of unconscious impudence, a harmless cynicism, and a sort of spasmodic giggle, that shook the eye-glasses which he wore stuck upon his nose.

But it was above all Madame de Thaller who excited Madame Favoral's apprehensions. Dressed in a magnificent costume of at least questionable taste, and very low in the neck, wearing large diamonds in her ears, and rings on all her fingers, the young baroness was insolently handsome, of a beauty sensuous even to coarseness. With hair of a bluish black, twisted above her neck in heavy ringlets, she displayed a skin of a pearly whiteness, lips redder than blood, and great eyes that threw flames from beneath their long, curved lashes. It was the poetry of flesh; and one could not help admiring. Did she speak, however, or make a gesture, all admiration vanished. The voice was vulgar, the motion common. If M. Jottras ventured upon a word with a double meaning, she would throw herself back upon her chair to laugh, stretching her neck, and thrusting her throat forward.

Wholly occupied with serving his guests, M. Favoral did not notice their behaviour. He only thought of loading their plates, and filling their glasses, complaining that they ate and drank nothing, asking anxiously if the cooking was not good, if the wines were bad, and almost driving the waiter out of his wits with questions and suggestions. It is a fact, that neither M. de Thaller nor M. Jottras had much appetite. But M. Saint-Pavin officiated for all; and the sole task of keeping up with him caused M. Favoral to become visibly animated. His cheeks were much flushed, when, having passed round the champagne, he raised his froth-tipped glass, exclaiming,—“I drink to the success of the scheme!”

“To the success of the scheme!” echoed the others, clinking glasses. And a few moments later, they passed into the drawing room to take their coffee.

This toast had caused Madame Favoral no little uneasiness. But she found it impossible to ask a single question, as Madame de Thaller dragged her almost by force to a seat by her side on the sofa, pretending that two women always have secrets to exchange, even when they see each other for the first time. The young baroness was an adept in matters of bonnets and dresses; and it was with amazing volubility that she asked Madame Favoral the names of her milliner and her dressmaker, and to what jeweller she intrusted her diamonds to be reset. This looked so much like a joke, that the poor little wife of the Rue St. Gilles could not help smiling whilst answering that she had no dressmaker, and that, possessing no diamonds, she had no possible use for the services of a jeweller. The other declared she could not get over it. No diamonds! That was a misfortune exceeding all others. And quick she charitably seized the opportunity to enumerate all the treasures of her jewel-case, the lace in her drawers, and the dresses in her wardrobes. In the first place, it would have been impossible for her, she swore, to live with a husband either miserly or poor. Hers had just presented her with a lovely brougham, lined with yellow satin, a perfect gem. And she made good use of it too, for she loved to go about. She spent the day-time in shopping, and driving in the Bois. Every evening she had the choice of the theatre or a ball, often both. The fast theatres were those she preferred. To be sure, the opera and the Théâtre Italien were more stylish; but she could not help gaping there. Then she wanted to kiss the children, and Gilberte and Maxence had to be brought in. She adored children, she vowed it was her weakness, her passion. She had

herself a little girl, eighteen months old, called Césarine, on whom she doted, and she certainly would have brought her, had she not feared that she would have been in the way.

All this chatter sounded like a confused murmur to Madame Favoral's ears. "Yes, no," she replied, hardly knowing to what she did answer. Her head heavy with a vague apprehension, it required her utmost attention to observe her husband and his guests. Standing by the mantelpiece, smoking their cigars, they conversed with considerable animation, but not loud enough to enable her to hear all they said. It was only when M. Saint-Pavin spoke that she understood that they were still talking of the scheme, for he spoke of articles to publish, shares to sell, dividends to distribute and sure profits to reap. They all, too, seemed to agree perfectly, and at a certain moment she saw her husband and M. de Thaller shake hands, as people do when they enter into an engagement.

Eleven o'clock struck. M. Favoral was trying to make his guests accept a cup of tea or a glass of punch, but M. de Thaller declared that he had some work to do, and that his carriage having come, he must go. And go he did, taking with him the baroness, followed by M. Saint-Pavin and M. Jottras. And when, the door having closed upon them, M. Favoral found himself alone with his wife, he exclaimed, swelling with gratified vanity, "Well, what do you think of our friends?"

"They surprised me," she answered.

He fairly jumped at that word. "I should like to know why?"

Then, timidly, and with infinite precautions, she commenced explaining that M. de Thaller's face inspired her with no confidence; that M. Jottras had seemed to her a very impudent personage; that M. Saint-Pavin appeared low and vulgar; and that the young baroness had given her of herself the most singular opinion. M. Favoral refused to hear more. "It's because you have never seen people of the best society," he exclaimed.

"Excuse me. Formerly, during my mother's lifetime—"

"Eh! Why, your mother never received any but shopkeepers."

The poor woman bowed her head. "I beg of you, Vincent," she insisted, "before doing anything with these new friends, think well, consult—"

He burst out laughing. "Are you not afraid that they will rob me?" he said,—"people ten times as rich as I am. Here, don't let us speak of it any more, and let us go to bed. You'll see what this dinner will bring us, and whether I ever have reason to regret the money I have spent!"

VIII.

WHEN, on the morning after this dinner, which was to form an era in her life, Madame Favoral awoke, her husband was already up, pencil in hand, and busy adding up. The charm had vanished with the fumes of the champagne, and the clouds of the worst days were gathering upon his brow. "It's expensive work to set a business going," he said in a bluff tone, noticing that his wife was looking at him; "and it wouldn't do to commence over again every day."

To hear him speak, one would have imagined that Madame Favoral alone, by continual worrying, had persuaded him to incur the expense he now seemed to regret so much. She quietly called his attention to this, reminding him that, far from urging, she had endeavoured to hold him back, repeating that she augured ill of the business about which he

was so enthusiastic, and that, if he would believe her he would not venture—

“Do you even know what the project is?” he interrupted rudely.

“You have not told me.”

“Very well, then; leave me in peace with your presentiments. You dislike my friends, and I saw very well how you treated Madame de Thaller. But I am the master, and what I have decided shall be. Besides, I have signed. Once for all, I forbid you ever speaking to me again on this subject. Whereupon, having dressed himself with much care, he started off, saying that he was expected at lunch by Saint-Pavin, the financial editor, and by M. Jottras, of the firm of Jottras Brothers.

A shrewd woman would not have given in so soon, and, in the end, would easily have mastered the despot, whose intellect was far from brilliant. But Madame Favoral was too proud to be shrewd: and besides, the springs of her will had been broken by the successive oppression of an odious step-mother and a brutal master. Her abdication of all was complete. Wounded, she kept the secret of her wound, hung her head, and said nothing. She did not, therefore, venture a single allusion, and nearly a week elapsed, during which the names of her late guests were not once mentioned. It was through a newspaper which M. Favoral had left in the drawing-room, that she learnt that the Baron de Thaller had just founded a new stock company, styled the Mutual Credit Bank, with a capital of several millions. Below the advertisement, which was printed in enormous letters, came a long article, in which it was demonstrated that the new company was, at the same time a patriotic undertaking and an institution of credit of the first class; that it supplied a great public want; that it would be of inestimable benefit to industry; that its profits were assured; and that to purchase shares was simply to draw short bills upon fortune. Already somewhat reassured by the reading of this article, Madame Favoral became quite so when she read the names of the board of directors. Nearly all were titled, and decorated with many orders; and the remainder were bankers, office-holders, and even some ex-ministers. “I must have been mistaken,” she thought, yielding unconsciously to the influence of print.

And no objection occurred to her when, a few days later, her husband said, “I have the situation I wanted. I am head cashier of the bank of which M. de Thaller is manager.” That was all. Of the nature of this bank, of the advantages which it offered him, not one word. Only by the way in which he expressed himself did Madame Favoral judge that he must have been well treated; and he further confirmed her in that opinion by granting her, of his own accord, a few additional francs for the daily expenses of the house. “We must,” he declared on this memorable occasion, “do honour to our social position, whatever it may cost.” For the first time in his life he seemed heedful of public opinion. He recommended his wife to be careful of her dress and of that of the children, and re-engaged a servant. He expressed the wish of enlarging their circle of acquaintances, and inaugurated his Saturday dinners, to which came assiduously M. and Madame Desclavettes, M. Chapelain the attorney, old Desormeaux, and a few others. As to himself, he gradually settled down into those habits, from which he was nevermore to depart, and the chronometric regularity of which had secured him the nickname of Old Punctuality, of which he was proud. In all other respects never did a man, to such a degree, become so utterly indifferent to his wife and children. His house was for him but a mere hotel, where he took his evening meal and slept. He never thought of

questioning his wife as to the use of her time, and what she did in his absence. Provided she did not ask him for money, and was there when he came home, he was satisfied.

Many women at Madame's Favoral's age, might have made a strange use of that insulting indifference and of that absolute freedom. If she did avail herself of it, it was solely to follow one of those inspirations which can only spring in a mother's heart. The increase in the budget of the household was relatively large, but so nicely calculated, that she had not a centime more that she could call her own. With the most intense sorrow, she thought that her children might have to endure the humiliating privations which had made her own life wretched. They were too young yet to suffer from the paternal parsimony, but they would grow, their desires would develop, and it would be impossible for her to grant them the most innocent gratifications. Whilst turning over and over in her mind this distressing thought, she remembered a friend of her mother's, who kept, in the Rue St. Denis, a large establishment for the sale of hosiery and woollen goods. There, perhaps, lay the solution of the problem. She called to see the worthy woman, and, without even needing to confess the whole truth to her, she obtained sundry pieces of work to do, ill paid as a matter of course, but which, by dint of close application, might be made to yield from eight to twelve francs a week. From this time she never lost a minute, concealing her work as if it were an evil act. She knew her husband well enough to feel certain that he would break out, and swear that he spent money enough to enable his wife to live without being reduced to making a workwoman of herself. But what joy, the day when she hid away down at the bottom of a drawer the first twenty-franc-piece she had earned, a beautiful gold coin, which belonged to her without contest, which no one knew of, and which she might spend as she pleased, without having to render an account to any one! And with what pride, from week to week, she saw her little treasure increase, despite the drafts she made upon it, sometimes to buy a toy for Maxence, sometimes to add a few ribbons to Gilberte's little dresses. This was the happiest time of her life, a halt on that painful road along which she had been dragging herself for so many years. Between her two children, the hours flew light and rapid as so many seconds. If all the hopes of the young girl, and of the wife had withered before they had blossomed, the mother's joys, at least, should not fail her. Because, whilst the present sufficed, to her modest ambition, the future had ceased to cause her any uneasiness.

No further reference had ever been made, between herself and her husband, to their guests of an evening; he never spoke to her of the Mutual Credit Bank, but now and then he allowed some words or exclamations to escape him, which she carefully recorded, and which betrayed a prosperous state of affairs. "That Thaller is a tough fellow!" he would exclaim, "and he has the most infernal luck!" And at other times, "Two or three more operations like the one we have just successfully wound up, and we can shut up shop!" From all this, what could she conclude, if not that he was marching with rapid strides towards that fortune, the object of all his ambition? Already in the neighbourhood he had the reputation of being very rich, which is the beginning of riches itself. He was admired for keeping his house with such rigid economy; for a man is always esteemed who has money, and does not spend it. "He is not the man ever to squander what he has," the neighbours repeated amongst themselves. The persons whom he received on Saturdays believed him more than comfortably off. When

M. Desclavettes and M. Chapelain had complained to their hearts' contents, the one of his shop, the other of his office, they never failed to add, "You laugh at our complaints, because you are engaged in those great transactions, in which people make as much money as they like." They seemed to hold his financial capacities in high estimation. They consulted him, and followed his advice. M. Desormeaux was wont to say, "Oh! he knows what he is about." And Madame Favoral persuaded herself, that, in this respect at least, her husband was a remarkable man. She attributed his constant silence and his innumerable distractions to the grave cares that filled his mind. In the same manner that he had once announced to her that they had enough to live on, she expected him, some fine morning, to tell her that he was a millionaire.

IX.

BUT the respite granted by fate to Madame Favoral was drawing to an end: her trials were about to return more poignant than ever, occasioned, this time, by her children, hitherto her whole happiness and her only consolation. Maxence was nearly twelve. He was a good little fellow, intelligent, studious at times, but thoughtless in the extreme, and of a turbulence which nothing could tame. At the school where he had been sent, he made his teacher's hair turn white; and not a week went by that he did not signalise himself by some fresh misdeed. A father like any other would have paid but slight attention to the pranks of a schoolboy, who, after all, ranked among the first of his class, and of whom the teachers themselves, whilst complaining, said, "Bah! What matters it, since his heart is good and his mind sound?" But M. Favoral took everything tragically. If Maxence was kept in, or otherwise punished, he pretended that it reflected upon himself, and declared that his son was disgracing him. If a report came home with this remark, "execrable conduct," he fell into the most violent passion, and seemed to lose all control of himself. "At your age," he would shout to the terrified boy, "I was working in a factory, and earning my livelihood. Do you suppose that I will not tire of making sacrifices to procure you the advantages of an education which I lack myself? Beware. Havre is not far off; and cabin-boys are always in demand there."

If, at least, he had confined himself to these admonitions, which by their very exaggeration, failed in their object! But he favoured mechanical appliances as a necessary means of sufficiently impressing reprimands upon the minds of young people; and therefore, seizing his cane, he would beat poor Maxence most unmercifully, the more so that the boy, filled with pride, would have allowed himself to be chopped to pieces rather than utter a cry, or shed a tear. The first time that Madame Favoral saw her son struck, she was seized with one of those wild fits of anger which do not reason, and never forgive. To be beaten herself would have seemed to her less atrocious, less humiliating. Hitherto she had found it impossible to love a husband such as hers; henceforth, she took him in utter aversion, he inspired her with horror. She looked upon her son as a martyr for whom she could hardly ever do enough. And so, after these harrowing scenes, she would press him to her heart in the most passionate embrace; she would cover with her kisses the traces of the blows; and she would strive, by the most delirious caresses, to make him forget the paternal brutalities. With him she sobbed. Like him she would shake her clinched fists in vacant space, exclaiming "Coward, tyrant, brute!" Little Gilberte mingled her

tears with theirs ; and, pressed against each other, they deplored their destiny, cursing the common enemy, the head of the family. Thus did Maxence spend his boyhood between equally fatal exaggerations, between the revolting brutalities of his father, and the dangerous caresses of his mother : the one depriving him of everything, the other refusing him nothing. For Madame Favoral had now found a use for her humble savings. If the idea had never come to the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank to put a few sous in his son's pocket, the too weak mother would have suggested to him the want of money in order to have the pleasure of gratifying it. She who had suffered so many humiliations in her life, she could not bear the idea of her son having his pride wounded, and being unable to indulge in those little trifling expenses which are the vanity of schoolboys. "Here, take this," she would say to him on holidays, slipping a few francs into his hands.

Unfortunately, to her present she joined the recommendation not to let his father know anything about it ; forgetting that she was thus training Maxence to dissimulate, warping his natural sense of right, and perverting his instincts. No, she gave ; and, to repair the gaps thus made in her treasure, she worked to the point of ruining her sight, with such eager zeal, that the worthy shop-keeper of the Rue St. Denis asked her if she did not employ work-girls. In truth, the only help she received was from Gilberte, who, at the age of eight, already knew how to make herself useful. And this is not all. For this son, in anticipation of growing expenses, she stooped to expedients which formerly would have seemed to her unworthy and disgraceful. She robbed the household, cheating on her own marketing. She went so far as to confide in her servant, and to make the girl the accomplice of her manœuvres. She applied all her ingenuity to serve to M. Favoral dinners in which the excellence of the dressing concealed the want of solid substance. And on Sunday, when she rendered her weekly accounts, it was without a blush that she increased by a few centimes the price of each object, rejoicing when she had thus scraped a dozen francs, and finding, to justify herself in her own eyes, those sophisms which passion never lacks. At first Maxence was too young to wonder from what sources his mother drew the money she lavished upon his schoolboy fancies. She asked him not to let his father know, he took care not to do so, and thought it perfectly natural. As he grew older, he learned to discern. The moment came when he opened his eyes upon the system under which the paternal household was managed. He noticed there that anxious economy which seems to betray want, and the acrimonious discussions which arose upon the inconsiderate use of a twenty-franc piece. He saw his mother realise miracles of industry to conceal the shabbiness of her clothes, and resort to the most skilful diplomacy when she wished to purchase a dress for Gilberte. And, despite all this, he had at his disposition as much money as those of his comrades whose parents had the reputation of being the most opulent and the most generous. Anxious, he questioned his mother. "What can it matter to you?" she answered, blushing and confused. "It is nothing to worry about!" And as he still asked, "Never you mind," she said, "we are rich." But he could hardly believe her, accustomed as he was to hear every one talk of poverty, and, as he fixed his great astonished eyes upon her. "Yes," she resumed, with an imprudence which, unfortunately, was to bear its fruits, "we are rich, and, if we live as we do, it is because it suits your father, who wishes to amass a still greater fortune." This was not exactly an answer, and yet Maxence asked

no further questions. But he made inquiries here and there, with that patient shrewdness of young people possessed with a fixed idea.

Already, at this time, M. Favoral possessed in the neighbourhood, and even among his own friends, the reputation of being worth at least a million. The Mutual Credit Bank had considerably developed itself; he must, so every one thought, have benefited largely by the circumstance, and the profits must have swelled rapidly in the hands of so able a man, and one so noted for his rigid economy. Such is the substance of what Maxence heard; but his informants did not fail to add ironically, that he would be wrong to rely upon the paternal fortune to pay for his amusements. M. Desormeaux himself, whom he had "pumped" rather cleverly, told him, whilst patting him amicably on the shoulder, "If you ever need money for your frolics, young man, try and earn it, for I'll be hanged if it's the old man who'll ever supply it." Such answers only served to complicate, instead of explain, the problem which occupied Maxence. He observed, he watched, and at last he acquired the certainty that the money he spent was the produce of the joint labour of his mother and sister. "Ah! why not have told me so?" he exclaimed, throwing his arms around his mother's neck. "Why have exposed me to the bitter regrets which I feel at this moment?" By these words alone, the poor woman found herself amply repaid. She admired the nobleness of her son's feelings and the kindness of his heart. "Do you not understand," she told him, shedding tears of joy, "do you not see, that the labour which can promote her son's pleasure is a happiness for his mother?" But he was dismayed at his discovery. "No matter!" he said. "I swear that I shall no longer scatter to the winds, as I have been doing, the money that you give me." For a few weeks, indeed, he was faithful to his pledge. But at seventeen resolutions are not very staunch. The impression he had felt wore off. He became tired of the small privations which he had to impose upon himself. He soon came to take to the letter what his mother had told him, and to prove to his own satisfaction that to deprive himself of a pleasure was to deprive her. He asked for ten francs one day, then ten francs another, and gradually resumed his old habits. He was at this time about leaving school. "The moment has come," said M. Favoral, "for you to select a career, and support yourself."

X.

MAXENCE FAVORAL had not waited for the paternal warnings to think of a profession. Modern schoolboys are precocious: they know the strong and the weak sides of life; and, when they study for their degree, they already have but few illusions left. And how could it be otherwise? In the interior of the colleges is fatally found the echo of the thoughts, and the reflection of the manners, of the time. Neither walls nor keepers can avail. With the city mud that stains their boots, the scholars bring back on their return from holidays their stock of observations and of facts. And what have they seen during the day in their families, or among their friends? Ardent cravings, insatiable appetites for luxuries, comforts, enjoyments, pleasures, contempt for patient labour, scorn for austere convictions, eager longing for money, the wish to become rich at any cost, and the firm resolution to ravish fortune on the first favourable occasion. To be sure, one has dissembled in their presence, but their perceptions are keen. True, their father has told them in a grave tone, that there is nothing respectable

in this world except labour and honesty ; but they have caught that same father scarcely noticing a poor devil of an honest man, and bowing to the earth before some clever rascal bearing the stigma of three condemnations, but worth six millions. Conclusion? Oh! they know very well how to draw a conclusion, for there are none such as young people to be logical and to deduce the utmost consequences of a fact. They know, most of them, that they will have to do something or other, but what? And it is then, that, during the recreations, their imagination strives to find that hitherto unknown profession which is to give them fortune without work, and freedom at the same time as a brilliant situation. They discuss and criticise freely all the careers which are open to youthful ambition. And how they laugh, if some simple fellow ventures upon suggesting one of those modest situations where a man can earn one hundred and fifty francs a month to begin with! One hundred and fifty francs!—why, it's hardly as much as many a boy spends for his cigars, and his cab-fares when he is late.

Maxence was neither better nor worse than the rest. Like the others he strove to discover the ideal profession which makes a man rich, and amuses him at the same time. Under the pretext that he drew very well, he talked of becoming a painter, calculating coolly what painting may yield, and reckoning, according to some newspaper, the earnings of a few of the most celebrated painters, who are at last reaping the fruits of unceasing efforts and crushing labours. But in the way of pictures, M. Vincent Favoral appreciated only the blue vignettes of the Bank of France. "I don't want any artist in my family," he said in a tone that admitted of no reply. Maxence would willingly have become an engineer, for it's rather the style to be an engineer now-a-days ; but the examinations for the Polytechnic School are rather difficult. Or else a cavalry officer ; but the two years at Saint Cyr are not very gay. Or head of department, like M. Desormeaux ; but he would have to begin by being supernumerary. Finally, after hesitating for a long time between law and medicine, he made up his mind to become a barrister, influenced, above all, by the joyous legends related of the students. That was not exactly M. Vincent Favoral's dream. "That's going to cost money again," he growled. The fact is, he had indulged in the fallacious hope that his son, as soon as he left college, would enter at once some business-house, where he would earn enough money to keep himself. He yielded at last, however, to the persistent entreaties of his wife, and the solicitations of his friends. "Be it so," he said to Maxence ; "you shall study law. Only, as it does not suit me that you should waste your time lounging in cafés, you shall at the same time work in an attorney's office. By next Saturday I will arrange the matter with my friend Chapelain." Maxence had not bargained for this ; and he came near backing out at the prospect of a discipline which he foresaw must be as exacting as that of the college. Still, as he could think of nothing better, and settled at a desk in M. Chapelain's office, which was then in the Rue St. Antoine.

The first year everything went on tolerably. He enjoyed as much freedom as he cared to. His father did not allow him one centime for his pocket-money ; but the attorney, in his capacity of an old friend of the family, did for him what he had never done before for an amateur clerk, and allowed him twenty francs a month. Madame Favoral adding to this a few five franc-pieces, Maxence declared himself entirely satisfied. Unfortunately,

with his lively imagination and his impetuous temper, no one was less fit than himself for that peaceful existence, that steady toil, the same each day, without the stimulus of difficulties to overcome, or the satisfaction of results obtained. Before long he became tired of it. He had found at the law-school a number of his old schoolmates whose parents resided in the provinces, and who, consequently, lived as they pleased, less assiduous to the lectures than to the cafés and the ball of the *Closerie des Lilas*. He envied them their joyous life, their freedom without control, their facile pleasures, their furnished rooms, and even the low eating-house where they took on credit whatever they could get, reserving the amount allowed them for their board for their amusements which had to be paid for in cash. But was not Madame Favoral there? She had worked so much, poor woman, especially since Mademoiselle Gilberte had become almost a young lady; she had saved so much, stinted so much, that her reserve, notwithstanding repeated drafts, amounted to a good round sum. When Maxence wanted two or three twenty-franc pieces, he had but a word to say; and he said it often. Thus, after a while, he became an excellent billiard-player; he kept his coloured meerschaum in the rack of a popular café; he took absinthe before dinner, and spent his evenings in the laudable effort to ascertain how many glasses of beer he could "put away." Gaining in audacity, he danced at Bullier's, dined in private rooms at Foyot's, and at last had a mistress.

So much so, that one afternoon, M. Favoral having to make a call in the student's quarter, found himself face to face with his son, who was strolling along, a cigar in his mouth, and on his arm a young lady, painted in superior style, and harnessed in a costume calculated to make the cab-horses rear. He returned to the Rue St. Gilles in a state of indescribable rage. "A woman!" he exclaimed in a tone of offended modesty. "A bad woman!—he! my son!" And when that son made his appearance, looking very sheepish, M. Favoral's first impulse was to resort to his former mode of correction. But Maxence was now over nineteen years of age. At the sight of the uplifted cane, he became whiter than his shirt; and, wrenching it from his father's hands, he broke it across his knee, threw the pieces violently upon the floor, and rushed out of the house. "He shall never again set his foot here!" screamed the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank, thrown into a great passion by an act of resistance which seemed to him unheard of. "I discard him. Let his clothes be packed up, and taken to some hotel. I never wish to see him again."

For a long time Madame Favoral and Gilberte fairly dragged themselves at his feet, before he consented to recall his determination. "He will disgrace us all!" he kept repeating, seeming unable to understand that it was himself who had, as it were, driven Maxence on to the fatal road which he was pursuing, forgetting that the absurd severity of the father prepared the way for the perilous indulgence of the mother, unwilling to own that the head of a family has other duties besides providing food and shelter for his wife and children, and that a father has but little right to complain who has not known how to make himself the friend and adviser of his son. At last, after the most violent recriminations, he forgave, in appearance at least. But the scales had dropped from his eyes. He started in quest of information, and received some very bad reports. He learnt from M. Chapelain whom he adroitly questioned, that Maxence remained whole weeks at a time without appearing at the office. If he had not complained before, it was because he had yielded to the urgent en-

treaties of Madame Favoral; and he was now glad, he added, of an opportunity to relieve his conscience by a full confession. Thus the cashier discovered, one by one, all his son's tricks. He heard that he was almost unknown at the law-school, that he spent his days in the cafés, and that, in the evening, when he believed him in bed and asleep, he was in fact running out to theatres and balls. "Ah! that's the way, is it?" he thought. "Ah, my wife and children are in league against me, the master! Very well, we shall see!"

XI.

FROM that moment, war was declared. From that day commenced in the Rue St. Gilles one of those domestic dramas which are still awaiting their Molière,—dramas of distressing vulgarity and sickening realism, but poignant, nevertheless, for they bring into action tears, blood, and a savage energy. M. Favoral thought himself certain to win. For did he not keep the key of the cash-box? And he who holds that key is assured of the victory, in an age where everything ends by money. Nevertheless, he was filled with irritating anxieties. He who had just discovered so many things which he did not even suspect a few days before, he could not discover the source whence his son drew the money which flowed like water from his prodigal hands. He had ascertained that Maxence had no debts, and yet it could not be with M. Chapelain's monthly allowance of twenty francs that he fed his frolics.

Madame Favoral and Gilberte, subjected separately to a skilful interrogatory, had managed to keep inviolate the secret of their mercenary labour. The servant, shrewdly questioned, had said nothing that could in any way cause the truth to be suspected. Here was, then, a mystery; and M. Favoral's constant anxiety could be read upon his knitted brows during his brief appearances in the house, that is, during dinner. From the manner in which he took his soup, it was easy to see that he was asking himself whether it was real soup, or whether he was not being imposed upon. From the expression of his eyes, it was easy to guess this question constantly present to his mind: "They are robbing me evidently; but how do they do it?" And he became distrustful, fussy, and suspicious, to an extent that he had never been before. It was with the most insulting precautions that he examined every Sunday his wife's accounts. He insisted on having an account at the grocer's, and settled it himself once a month; he had every butcher's ticket shown him. He would inquire the price of an apple as he peeled it over his plate, and never failed to stop at the fruiterer's, to make sure that he had not been deceived. But it was all in vain. And yet he knew that Maxence always had two or three five-franc-pieces in his pocket. "Where do you steal them from?" he asked him one day. "I save them out of my salary," boldly answered the young man.

Exasperated, M. Favoral wished to make the whole world take an interest in his investigations. And one Saturday evening, as he was talking with his friends, M. Chapelain, the worthy Desclavettes, and old Desormeaux, he said, pointing to his wife and daughter:—"Those d—d women rob me for the benefit of my son; and they do it so cleverly that I can't find out how! They have an understanding with the shop-keepers, who are but licensed thieves; and nothing is eaten here but that for which they make me pay double the value."

M. Chapelain made an ill-concealed grimace, whilst M. Desclavettes sin-

erely admired a man who had at least courage enough to confess his meanness. But M. Desormeaux never minced matters. "Do you know, friend Vincent," he observed, "that it requires a strong stomach to dine with a man who passes his time calculating the cost of every mouthful that his guests swallow?"

M. Favoral turned red in the face. "It is not the expense that I deplore," he replied, "but the duplicity. I am rich enough, thank Heaven! not to begrudge a few francs; and I would gladly give my wife twice as much as she takes, if she would only ask it frankly."

But that was a lesson. Hereafter he was careful to dissimulate, and seemed exclusively occupied in subjecting his son to a system of his invention, the excessive rigour of which would have upset the coolest hand. He required him daily to furnish written attestations of his attendance both at the law-school and at the lawyer's office. He marked out the itinerary of his walks for him, and calculated the time they required, within a few minutes. Immediately after dinner he shut him up in his room, under lock and key, and never failed, when he came home at ten o'clock, to make sure of his presence. He could not have taken steps better calculated to exalt still more Madame Favoral's blind tenderness. When she heard that Maxence had a mistress, she received a great shock to her most cherished feelings. It is never without a secret jealousy that a mother discovers that a woman has robbed her of her son's heart. She had retained a certain amount of ill-feeling against him on account of a dissoluteness, which, in her candour, she had never suspected. She forgave him everything when she saw the treatment he received. She encouraged him, believing him to be the victim of a most unjust persecution. In the evening, after her husband had gone out, Gilberte and herself would take their sewing, sit in the passage outside his room, and converse with him through the door. Never had they worked so hard for the shop-keeper in the Rue St. Denis. Some weeks they earned as much as twenty-five or thirty francs. Maxence's patience, however, was exhausted; and one morning he resolutely declared that he would no longer attend the lectures of the law-school, that he had been mistaken in his vocation, and that there was no human power capable to make him return to M. Chapelain's.

"And where will you go?" exclaimed his father. "Do you expect me eternally to supply your wants?"

He answered that it was precisely in order to support himself, and conquer his independence, that he had resolved to abandon a profession, which, after two years, yielded him only twenty francs a month. "I want some business where I have a chance to get rich," he continued. "I would like to enter a banking-house, or some great financial establishment."

Madame Favoral jumped at the idea. "Why not," she said to her husband, "why not find a place for our son at the Mutual Credit Bank? There he would be under your own eyes. Intelligent as he is, backed by M. de Thaller and yourself, he would soon earn a good salary."

M. Favoral knit his brows. "That I will never do," said he. "I have not sufficient confidence in my son. I will not run the risk of his compromising the consideration which I have acquired for myself." And, revealing to a certain extent the secret of his position, he added, "A cashier, who like me handles immense sums, cannot be too careful of his reputation. Confidence is a delicate thing in these times, when there are so many cashiers constantly on the road to Belgium. Who knows what would be thought of me, if I was known to have such a son as mine?"

Madame Favoral was insisting, nevertheless, when he interrupted her sharply, saying, "Enough! Maxence is free. I allow him two years to establish himself in some position. That delay over, good-bye; he can go and find board and lodging where he pleases. That's all. I don't want to hear anything more about it."

It was with a sort of frenzy that Maxence abused that freedom; and in less than two weeks he had dissipated what his mother and sister had taken three months to earn. At the end of that time, he succeeded, thanks to M. Chapelain, in obtaining employment at an architect's. This was not a very brilliant opening; and the probability was, that he would remain a clerk all his life. But the future did not trouble him much. For the present, he was delighted with this inferior position, which assured him one hundred and seventy-five francs a month. One hundred and seventy-five francs! A fortune! And so he rushed into that life of questionable pleasures, where so many wretches have left not only the money which was theirs, which does not matter, but the money which was not theirs, and that leads straight to the police-court. He made friends with those shabby fellows who walk up and down in front of the Café Riche, with an empty stomach, and a tooth-pick between their teeth. He became a regular customer at those low cafés of the Boulevards, where plastered girls smile at the passers-by. He frequented those suspicious dining-rooms where baccarat is played after dinner on a wine-stained table-cloth, and where the police make periodical raids. He indulged in suppers in those night restaurants where people throw the bottles at each other's heads after drinking the contents. Often he remained twenty-four hours without coming to the Rue St. Gilles; and then Madame Favoral spent the night in the most fearful anxiety. Suddenly, at some hour when he knew his father to be absent, he would appear, and, taking his mother aside, say in a sheepish tone, "I very much want a little money."

She gave it to him; and she kept giving it so long as she had any, not, however, without observing timidly to him that Gilberte and herself earned very little. Until finally one evening, and to a fresh demand, she answered sorrowfully, "Alas! I have nothing left, and it is only on Monday that we are to take our work back. Couldn't you wait until then?"

He could not wait; he was expected by some friends. Blind devotion begets ferocious egotism. He wanted his mother to go out and borrow the money from one of the tradespeople. She was hesitating. He spoke louder. Then Mademoiselle Gilberte appeared. "Have you really no heart?" she said. "It seems to me, that, if I were a man, I would not ask my mother and sister to work for me!"

XII.

GILBERTE FAVORAL had just completed her eighteenth year. Rather tall and slender, her every motion betrayed the admirable proportions of her figure, and had that grace which results from the harmonious blending of liness and strength. She did not strike one at first sight, but soon a penetrating and indefinable charm arose from her whole person; and one knew not which to admire most,—the exquisite perfections of her figure, the divine roundness of her neck, her aerial carriage, or the placid ingenuousness of her attitudes. She could not be called beautiful, inasmuch as her features lacked regularity; but the extreme mobility of her countenance, upon which could be read all the emotions of her soul, had an irresistible seduc.

tion. Her large eyes, of velvety blue, had untold depths and an incredible intensity of expression; the almost imperceptible quiver of her rosy nostrils revealed an untamable pride; and the smile that played upon her lips told her immense contempt for everything petty and mean. But her real beauty was her hair, of a blonde so luminous that it seemed powdered with diamond-dust; so thick and so long, that, to be able to twist and confine it, she had to cut off heavy locks of it to the very root. She, alone in the house, did not tremble at her father's voice. The studied despotism which had subdued Madame Favoral made her daughter revolt, and her energy had become tempered under the same system of oppression which had unnerved Maxence. Whilst her mother and her brother lied with that quiet impudence of the slave, whose sole weapon is duplicity, Gilberte preserved a sullen silence. And if complicity was imposed upon her by circumstances, if she had to maintain a falsehood, each word cost her such a painful effort, that her features became quite distorted. Never, when her own interests alone were at stake, had she stooped to an untruth. Fearlessly, and whatever might be the result, she would say, "That is the fact."

Knowing this, M. Favoral could not help respecting her to a degree; and, when he was in a good humour, he would call her the Empress Gilberte. For her alone he had some deference and some politeness. When she looked at him, he moderated the brutality of his language, and every Saturday he brought her a few flowers. He had even allowed her a professor of music, though he was wont to declare that a woman needs but two accomplishments,—to cook and to sew. But she had insisted so much, that he had at last discovered for her, in an attic of the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule, an old Italian master, Signor Gismondo Pulci, a sort of unknown genius, to whom thirty francs a month were a fortune, and who conceived a sort of religious fanaticism for his pupil. Though he had always refused to write a note, he consented, for her sake, to fix the melodies that buzzed in his cracked brain; and some of them were admirable. He dreamed of composing an opera for her that would transmit the name of Gismondo Pulci to the most remote generations. "The Signorina Gilberte is the very goddess of music," he said to M. Favoral, with transports of enthusiasm, which intensified still more his frightful accent. The head cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank shrugged his shoulders, answering that there is no harmony for a man who spends his days listening to the exciting music of golden coins. In spite of which, his vanity seemed highly gratified, when on Saturday evenings, after dinner, Mademoiselle Gilberte sat at the piano, and Madame Desclavettes, suppressing a yawn, would exclaim,—“What remarkable talent the dear child has!”

The young girl had, then, a positive influence; and it was to her entreaties alone, and not to those of his wife, that he had several times forgiven Maxence. He would have done much more for her, had she wished it; but she would have been compelled to ask and to insist, or to beg. "And it's humiliating," she used to say. Sometimes Madame Favoral scolded her gently, saying that her father would certainly not refuse her one of those pretty dresses which are the ambition and the joy of young girls. But she would reply,—“It is much less mortification to me to wear what I do than to meet with a refusal, my dresses please me as they are.”

With such a character, surrounded, however, by a meek resignation, and an unalterable composure, she inspired a certain respect to both her mother and her brother, who admired in her an energy of which they felt themselves incapable. And when she appeared, and commenced reproaching him

in an indignant tone of voice, with the baseness of his conduct, and his insatiate demands, Maxence felt quite ashamed.

"I did not know," he commenced, turning as red as fire.

She crushed him with a look of mingled contempt and pity; and, in an accent of haughty irony, she said, "Indeed, you do not know whence the money comes that you extort from our mother!" And holding up her hands still remarkably handsome, though slightly deformed by the work she did; the fourth finger of the right hand bent by the thread, and the fore-finger of the left tattooed and lacerated by the needle. "Indeed," she repeated, "you do not know that my mother and myself, we spend all our days, and the greater part of our nights, working!" Hanging his head, he said nothing. "If it were for myself alone," she continued, "I would not speak to you thus. But look at our mother! See her poor eyes, red and weak from constant labour! If I have said nothing until now, it is because I did not as yet despair of your heart; because I hoped that you would recover some feeling of decency. But no, nothing. With time, your last scruples seem to have vanished. You used formerly to beg humbly; now you demand rudely. How soon will you resort to blows?"

"Gilberte!" stammered the poor fellow, "Gilberte!"

"Money!" she went on, "always, and without a moment's respite, you want money; no matter whence it comes, nor what it costs. If, at least, you had, to justify your expenses, the excuse of some great passion; or of some object in view, even were it absurd, ardently pursued! But I defy you to confess upon what degrading pleasures you lavish our humble economies. I defy you to tell us what you mean to do with the money that you demand to-night,—that money for which you would have our mother stoop to beg the assistance of a shop-keeper, to whom she would be compelled to reveal the secret of our misery!"

Madame Favoral, touched by the frightful humiliation of her son, timidly murmured:—"He is so unhappy!"

"He unhappy!" exclaimed Gilberte. "What, then, shall we say of us? and, above all, what shall you say of yourself, mother? Unhappy? he, a man, who has liberty and strength, to whom the world is open, who may undertake everything, attempt everything, dare everything. Ah, how I wish I were a man! I would be a man like there are a few, and I would have protected you, my dear mother, long, long ago, against my father; and I would have begun to repay you all you have done for me."

Madame Favoral was sobbing. "I beg of you," she again murmured, "spare him."

"Be it so," said the young girl. "But you must allow me to tell him that it is not for his sake that I devote my youth to a mercenary labour. It is for you, darling mother, that you may have the joy to give him what he asks, since it is your only joy."

Maxence shuddered under the breath of that great indignation. He felt that he deserved only too much that frightful humiliation. He understood the justice of those cruel reproaches. And, as his heart had not yet been spoiled by the contact of his boon companions; as he was weak, rather than wicked; as the sentiments which are the honour and pride of a man were not yet dead within him he exclaimed:—"Ah! you are a brave sister, Gilberte, and what you have just done is well. You have been harsh, but not as much as I deserve. Thanks for your courage, which will give me back mine. Yes, it is a shame for me to have thus cowardly taken advan-

tage of you both." And, raising his mother's hand to his lips, he continued, his eyes overflowing with tears, "Forgive, mother, forgive him who swears to you to redeem his past, and to become your support, instead of being a crushing burden to you.

He was interrupted by the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and some one whistling.

"My husband!" exclaimed Madame Favoral,—“your father, my children!"

"Well, and what then?" said Mademoiselle Gilberte coolly.

"Don't you hear that he is whistling? and do you forget that it is a proof that he is furious? What new trial threatens us now?"

XIII.

MADAME FAVORAL spoke from experience. She had learned, to her cost, that the whistle of her husband, more surely than the shriek of the stormy petrel, announced a storm. And she had that evening more reasons than usual to fear. Contrary to all his habits, M. Favoral had not come home to dinner, and had sent one of the messengers of the Mutual Credit Bank to say that they should not wait for him. Soon his latch-key grated in the lock; the door swung open; he came in; and, seeing his son, "Well, I am glad to find you here!" he exclaimed with a giggle, which with him was the utmost expression of anger.

Madame Favoral shuddered. Still under the impression of the scene which had just taken place, his heart heavy, and his eyes full of tears, Maxence did not answer.

"It is doubtless a wager," resumed the father, "and you wish to know how far my patience will go."

"I do not understand you," stammered the young man.

"The money that you used to get, I know not where, doubtless fails you now, or at least is no longer sufficient, and you go on making debts right and left,—at the tailor's, the shirt-maker's, the jeweller's—Of course, it's simple enough! We earn nothing; but we wish to dress in the latest style, to wear a gold chain across our waistcoat, and then we make dupes—"

"I have never made any dupes, father."

"Bah! And what, then, do you call all these people who came this very day to present their bills to me? For they did dare to come to the bank, to my office! They had agreed to come together, expecting thus to intimidate me more easily. I told them that you were of age, and that your business was none of mine. Hearing this they became insolent, and commenced speaking so loud, that their voices could be heard in the adjoining rooms. At that very moment, the manager, M. de Thaller, happened to be passing through the hall. Hearing the noise of a discussion, he thought that I was having some difficulty with some one of our shareholders, and he came in, as he had a right to. Then I was compelled to confess everything." He became excited at the sound of his words, like a horse at the jingle of his bells. And, more and more beside himself, he continued:—"That is just what your creditors wished. They thought I would be afraid of a row, and that I would pay up. It is a system of blackmailing, like many others, and very much in vogue just now. An account is opened to some young rascal; and when the amount is reasonably large, one presents it to the family, saying, 'Pay or I will create a scandal.' Do you

think it is to you, who are penniless, that they gave credit? It was on my pocket that they were drawing,—on my pocket, because they believe me rich. They sold you at exorbitant prices everything they wished; and they relied on me to pay for trousers at ninety francs, shirts at forty francs, and watches at six hundred francs."

Contrary to his habit, Maxence did not offer any denial. "I will pay all I owe," he said.

"You!"

"I give my word I will!"

"And with what, pray?"

"With my salary,"

"You have a salary, then?"

Maxence blushed. "I have what I earn at my employer's."

"What employer?"

"The architect in whose office M. Chapelain helped me to find a place."

With a threatening gesture, M. Favoral interrupted him. "Spare me your lies," he exclaimed. "I know more than you suppose. I know, that, over a month ago, your employer, tired of your idleness, dismissed you in disgrace."

Disgrace was superfluous. The fact was, that Maxence, returning to work after an absence of five days, had found another in his place. "I will procure other employment," he said.

M. Favoral shrugged his shoulders with a movement of rage. "And in the mean time," he said, "I shall have to pay. Do you know what your creditors threaten to do?—to commence a suit against me. They would lose it, of course, they know it; but they hope that I will yield before a scandal. For this is not all: they talk of entering a criminal complaint. They pretend that you have audaciously swindled them; that the articles you purchased of them were not at all for your own use, but that you sold them as fast as you got them, at any price you could obtain, to raise ready money. The jeweller has proofs, he says, that you went straight from his shop to the pawnbroker's, and pledged a watch and chain which he had just sold you. It is a matter for the police. They said all that before the manager, before M. de Thaller. I had to get the porter to turn them out. But, after they had left, M. de Thaller gave me to understand that he wished me very much to settle everything. And he is right. My reputation could not resist another scene like that. What confidence can be placed in a cashier whose son is a libertine and a swindler? How can the key of a safe containing millions be left with a man whose son has been dragged into the police-courts? In a word, I am at your mercy. In a word, my honour, my position, and my fortune, are in your hands. As often as it may please you to make debts, you will do so, and I shall be compelled to pay."

Gathering all his courage, Maxence replied, "You have been sometimes very harsh with me, father, and yet I will not try to justify my conduct. I swear to you, that hereafter you shall have nothing to fear from me."

"I fear nothing," exclaimed M. Favoral with a sinister smile. "I know sure means of placing myself beyond the reach of your follies, and I shall make use of them."

"I assure you, father, that I have taken a firm resolution."

"Oh! spare me your periodical repentance."

Mademoiselle Gilberte stepped forward and said: "I'll stand warrant for Maxence's resolutions."

Her father did not permit her to proceed. "Enough," he interrupted harshly. "Mind your own business, Gilberte. I have to speak to you too."

"To me, father?"

"Yes."

He walked up and down the room three or four times, as if to calm his irritation. Then planting himself straight in front of his daughter, his arms folded across his breast, he resumed: "You are eighteen years of age, that is to say, it is time to think of your marriage. An excellent match offers itself."

She shuddered, stepped back, and, redder than a peony, she repeated in a tone of immense surprise: "A match!"

"Yes, and which suits me."

"But I do not wish to marry, father."

"All young girls say the same thing; and, as soon as a pretender presents himself, they are delighted. Mine is a young fellow of twenty-six, good-looking, amiable, witty, and who has had the greatest success in society."

"Father, I assure you that I do not wish to leave my mother."

"Of course not. He is an intelligent, hard-working man, destined, everybody says, to make an immense fortune. Although he is rich already, for he holds a controlling interest in a stock-broker's firm, he works as hard as any poor devil. I would not be a bit surprised to hear that he makes half a million of francs a-year. His wife will have her carriage, her box at the opera, diamonds, and dresses as handsome as Madame de Thaller's."

"Eh! What do I care for such things?"

"It's understood. I'll present him to you on Saturday."

But Mademoiselle Gilberte was not one of those young girls who allow themselves, through weakness or timidity, to become engaged against their will, and so far engaged, that later they can no longer withdraw. A discussion being unavoidable, she preferred to have it out at once. "A presentation is absolutely useless, father," she declared resolutely.

"Because?"

"I have already told you, I do not wish to marry."

"But if it is my will?"

"I am ready to obey you in everything except that—"

"In that as in everything else," interrupted the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank in a thundering voice. And, casting upon his wife and children a glance full of defiance and threats, he repeated, "In that, as in everything else, because I am the master, and I shall prove it. Yes, I will prove it, for I am tired to see my family leagued against my authority." And he went out, slamming the door so violently, that everything in the room shook.

"You are wrong to resist your father thus," murmured the weak Madame Favoral. The fact is, that the poor woman could not understand why her daughter refused the only means at her command to break off with her miserable existence. "Let him introduce this young man to you," she continued. "You might like him."

"I am sure I shall not like him."

Gilberte said this in such a tone, that the real truth suddenly flashed upon Madame Favoral's mind. "Heavens!" she murmured. "Gilberte, my darling child, have you then a secret which your mother does not know?"

XIV.

YES, Mademoiselle Gilberte had a secret,—a very simple one, though, chaste like herself, and one of those which, as the old women say, must cause the angels to rejoice. The spring of that year having been unusually mild, Madame Favoral and her daughter had been in the habit of going daily to breathe the fresh air in the garden of the Place Royale. They took their work with them, crochet or knitting ; so that this salutary exercise did not in any way diminish the earnings of the week. It was during these walks that Mademoiselle Gilberte had at last noticed a young man, unknown to her, whom she met every day at the same place. Tall and robust, he had a noble look, notwithstanding his modest clothes, the exquisite neatness of which betrayed a sort of respectable poverty. He wore a full beard, and his proud and intelligent features were lighted up by a pair of large black eyes, whose straight and clear look disconcerted hypocrites and knaves. He never failed, as he passed by Mademoiselle Gilberte, to look down, or turn his head slightly away ; and in spite of this, in spite of the expression of respect which she had detected upon his face, she could not help blushing. “Which is absurd,” thought she ; “for, after all, what on earth do I care for this young man ?” The infallible instinct, which is the experience of inexperienced young girls, told her that it was not chance alone that brought this stranger in her way. But she wished to make sure of it. She managed so well, that, each day of the following week, the hour of their walk was changed. Sometimes they went out at noon, sometimes after four o'clock. But, whatever the hour, Mademoiselle Gilberte, as she turned the corner of the Rue des Minimes, noticed her unknown admirer under the arcades, standing in front of some shop-window, and watching out of the corner of his eye. As soon as she appeared, he left his post, and hurried fast enough to pass her as she entered the garden. “It is a persecution !” thought Mademoiselle Gilberte. Why, then, had she not spoken of it to her mother ? Why had she not said anything to her the day, when, happening to look out of the window, she saw the “persecutor” passing before the house, and evidently looking in her direction ? “Am I going crazy ?” she thought, seriously irritated against herself. “I will not think of him any more.”

And yet she was thinking of him, when one afternoon, as her mother and herself were sitting upon one of the seats working, she saw the stranger come and sit down not far from them. He was accompanied by an elderly gentleman with long white moustaches, and wearing the rosette of the Legion of Honour. “This is an insolence,” thought the young girl, whilst seeking a pretext to ask her mother to change their seat. But already had the young man and his elderly friend so arranged their chairs, that Mademoiselle Gilberte could not miss a word of what they were about to say. It was the young man who spoke first. “You know me as well as I know myself, my dear count,” he commenced,—“you who were my poor father's best friend, you who dandled me upon your knees when I was a child, and who have never lost sight of me.”

"Which is to say, my boy, that I answer for you as for myself," put in the old man. "But continue."

"I am twenty-six years old. My name is Yves-Marius-Genost de Trégars. My family, which is one of the oldest of Brittany, is allied to all the great families."

"Perfectly exact!" remarked the old gentleman.

"Unfortunately, my fortune is not on a par with my nobility. When my mother died, in 1856, my father, who worshipped her, could no longer bear, in the intensity of his grief, to remain at the Château de Trégars where he had spent his whole life. He came to Paris, which he could well afford, since we were rich then, but, unfortunately, made acquaintances who soon inoculated him with the fever of the age. They proved to him that he was mad to keep lands which barely yielded him forty thousand francs a-year, and which he could easily sell for two millions; which amount, invested merely at five per cent, would yield him an income of one hundred thousand francs. He therefore sold everything, except our patrimonial domain situated on the road from Quimper to Audierne, and rushed into speculation. He was rather lucky at first. But he was too honest and too loyal to be lucky long. An operation in which he became interested early in 1869 turned out badly. His associates became rich; but he, I know not how, was ruined, and came near being compromised. He died of grief less than a month later."

The old soldier nodded assent. "That is all very true, my boy," he said. "But you are too modest; there's an important circumstance which you neglect. You had a right, when your father became involved in these troubles, to claim and retain your mother's fortune; that is, some thirty thousand francs a year. Not only you did not do so; but you gave up everything to his creditors. You sold the domain of Trégars, except the old château and its park, and paid over the proceeds to them; so that, though your father died ruined, he owed nothing. And yet you knew, as well as myself, that your father had been deceived and swindled by a lot of scoundrels who now drive in their carriages, and who, perhaps, if justice were applied to, might still be made to disgorge their ill-gotten plunder."

Her head bent on her tapestry, Mademoiselle Gilberte seemed to be working with incomparable zeal. The truth is, she knew not how to conceal the blushes on her cheeks, and the trembling of her hands. She had something like a cloud before her eyes; and she drove her needle at random. She scarcely preserved enough presence of mind to reply to Madame Favoral, who, not noticing anything, spoke to her from time to time. Indeed, the meaning of this scene was too clear to escape her. "They have had an understanding," she thought, "and it is for me alone that they are speaking."

Meantime, Marius de Trégars was saying, "I should lie, my old friend, were I to say that I was indifferent to our ruin. Philosopher though one may be, it is not without some pangs that one passes from a sumptuous mansion to a gloomy attic. But what grieved me most of all was that I saw myself compelled to give up the labours which had been the joy of my life, and upon which I had founded the most magnificent hopes. A positive vocation, stimulated further by the accidents of my education, had led me to the study of physical science. For several years, I had applied all I have of intelligence and energy to certain investigations in electricity. To convert electricity into an incomparable motive-power which would

supersede steam,—such was the object I pursued incessantly. Already, as you know, although quite young, I had obtained results which had attracted some attention in the scientific world. I thought I could see the result of a problem, the solution of which would change the face of the globe. Ruin was the death of my hopes, the total loss of the fruits of my labours; for my experiments were costly, and it required money, a great deal of money, to purchase the materials which were indispensable to me, and to construct the machines which I contrived. And I was about being compelled to earn my daily bread. I was on the verge of despair, when I met a man whom I had formerly seen at my father's, and who had seemed to take some interest in my researches, a speculator named Marcolet. But it is not on the Bourse that he operates. Industry is the field of his labours. Ever on the look-out for those obstinate inventors who are starving to death in their garrets, he appears to them at the hour of supreme crisis; he pities them, encourages them, consoles them, helps them, and almost always succeeds in becoming the owner of their discovery. Sometimes he makes a mistake: and then all he has to do is to put a few thousand francs to the debit of profit or loss. But, if he has judged right, then he counts his profits by hundreds of thousands; and how many patents does he work thus! Of how many inventions does he reap the results which are a fortune, and the inventors of which have no shoes to wear! Everything is good to him; and he defends with the same avidity a cough mixture, the formula of which he has purchased of some poor devil of a druggist, and an improvement to the steam-engine, the patent for which has been sold to him by an engineer of genius. And yet Marcolet is not a bad man. Seeing my situation, he offered me a certain sum yearly to undertake some studies of industrial chemistry which he indicated to me. I accepted; and the very next day I hired a small apartment on the ground-floor in the Rue des Tournelles, where I set up my laboratory, and went to work at once. That was a year ago. Marcolet must be satisfied. I have already found for him a new shade for dyeing silk, the cost price of which is almost nothing. As to me, I have lived with the strictest economy, devoting all my surplus earnings to the prosecution of the problem, the solution of which would give me both glory and fortune."

Palpitating with inexpressible emotion, Mademoiselle Gilberte was listening to this young man, unknown to her a few moments before, and whose whole history she now knew as well as if she had always lived near him; for it never occurred to her to suspect his sincerity. No voice had ever vibrated in her ear like this voice, whose grave sonorousness stirred within her strange sensations, and legions of thoughts which she had never suspected. She was surprised at the accent of simplicity with which he spoke of the illustriousness of his family, of his past opulence, of his present poverty, of his obscure labours, and of his exalted hopes. She admired the superb disregard for money which beamed forth in his every word. Here was then one man, at least, who despised that money before which she had hitherto seen prostrated all the people she knew.

After a pause of a few moments, Marius de Trégars, still addressing himself apparently to his aged companion, resumed,—“I repeat it, because it is the truth, my old friend, this life of labour and privation, so new to me, was not a burden. Calm, silence, the constant exercise of all the faculties of the intellect, have charms which the vulgar can never suspect. I was happy to think, that, if I was ruined, it was through an act of my own will. I found a positive pleasure in the fact that I, Marquis de Trégars,

who had possessed a hundred thousand francs a year,—I must the next moment go out in person to the baker's and the green-grocer's to purchase my supplies for the day. I was proud to think that it was to my labour alone, to the work for which I was paid by Marcolet, that I owed the means of prosecuting my task. And, from the summits where I was carried on the wings of science, I took pity on your modern existence, on that ridiculous and tragical medley of passions, interests, and cravings, that struggle without truce or mercy, whose law is, woe to the weak ! In which whosoever falls is trampled under foot ! Sometimes, however, like a fire that has been smouldering under the ashes, the flame of youthful passions blazed up within me. I had hours of madness, of discouragement, of distress, during which solitude was loathsome to me. But I had the faith which raises mountains,—faith in myself and my work. And soon, tranquillised, I would go to sleep in the purple of hope, beholding in the vista of the distant future the triumphal arches erected to my success. Such was my situation, when, one afternoon in the month of February last, after an experiment upon which I had founded great hopes, and which had just miserably failed, I came here to breathe a little fresh air. It was a beautiful spring day, warm and sunny. The sparrows were chirping on the branches, swelled with sap ; bands of children were running along the paths, filling the air with their joyous cries. I was sitting upon a bench, ruminating over the causes of my failure, when two ladies passed by me ; one somewhat aged, the other quite young. They were walking so rapidly, that I hardly had time to see them. But the young lady's step, the noble simplicity of her carriage, had struck me so much, that I rose to follow her with the intention of passing her, and then walking back to have a good view of her face. I did so ; and I was fairly dazzled. At the moment when my eyes met hers, a voice rose within me, crying that it was all over now, and that my destiny was fixed."

"I remember, my dear boy," remarked the old gentleman in a tone of friendly raillery ; " for you came to see me that evening, and I had not seen you for months before."

Marius proceeded, without heeding the remark. " And yet you know that I am not the man to yield to a first impression. I struggled : with determined energy I strove to drive off that radiant image which I carried within my soul, which left me no more, which haunted me in the midst of my studies. Vain efforts ! My thoughts obeyed me no longer ; my will escaped my control. It was indeed one of those passions that fill the whole being, overpower all, and which make of life an ineffable felicity or a nameless torture, according that they are reciprocated, or not. How many days I spent, waiting and watching for her of whom I had thus had a glimpse, and who ignored my very existence ! And what insane palpitations, when, after hours of consuming anxiety, I saw at the corner of the street the undulating folds of her dress ! I saw her thus often, and always with the same elderly person, her mother. They had chosen in this garden a particular seat, where they sat daily, working at their sewing with an assiduity and zeal which made me think that they lived upon the product of their labour."

Here he was suddenly interrupted by his companion. The old gentleman feared that Madame's Favoral's attention might at last be attracted by too direct allusions. " Take care, boy ! " he whispered, not so low, however, but that Gilberte overheard him.

It would have required, however, much more than this to draw Madame Favoral from her sad thoughts. She had just finished her piece of embroid-

ery; and, grieving to lose a moment, she said to her daughter, "It is perhaps time to go home, I have nothing more to do."

Mademoiselle Gilberte drew from her basket a piece of stuff, and, handing it to her mother, replied in a troubled voice: "Here is enough to go on with, mamma. Let us stay a little while longer."

And Madame Favoral having resumed her work, Marius proceeded,— "The thought that she whom I loved was poor delighted me. Was not this similarity of positions a link between us? I felt a childish joy to think that I would work for her and for her mother, and that they would be indebted to me for their ease and comfort in life. But I am not one of those dreamers who confide their destiny to the wings of a chimera. Before undertaking anything, I resolved to obtain information. Alas! at the first words that I heard, all my fine dreams took flight. I learnt that she was rich, very rich. I was told that her father was one of those men whose rigid probity surrounds itself with austere and harsh forms. He owed his fortune, I was assured, not only to his sole labour, but also to prodigies of economy and the most severe privations. He professed a worship, they said, for that gold that had cost him so much; and he would never give the hand of his daughter to a man who had no money. This last comment was useless. Above my actions, my thoughts, my hopes, higher than all, soars my pride. Instantly I saw an abyss opening between me and her whom I love more than my life, but less than my dignity. When a man's name is Genost de Trégars, he must support his wife, even were it by breaking stones. And the thought that I owed my fortune to the woman I married would make me execrate her. You must remember, my old friend, that I told you all this at the time. You thought, too, that it was singularly impertinent, on my part, thus to flare up in advance, because certainly a millionaire would not give his daughter to a ruined nobleman in the pay of Marcolet, the patent-broker, to a poor devil of an inventor, who is building the castles of his future upon the solution of a problem which has been given up by the most brilliant minds. It was then that I determined upon an extreme resolution, a foolish one, no doubt, and yet to which you, the Count de Villegré, my father's old friend, you have consented to lend yourself. I thought that I would address myself to her, to her alone, and that she would at least know what great, what immense love she had inspired. I thought I would go to her and tell her, 'This is who I am, and what I am. For mercy's sake, grant me a respite of three years. To a love such as mine, nothing is impossible. In three years I shall be dead, or rich enough to ask your hand. From this day forth, I give up my task for work of more immediate profit. The arts of industry have treasures for successful inventors. If you could only read in my soul, you would not refuse me the delay I am asking. Forgive me! One word, for mercy's sake, only one! It is my sentence that I am awaiting.'"

Mademoiselle Gilberte's thoughts were in too great a state of confusion to permit her to think of being offended at this extraordinary proceeding. She rose, shivering, and addressing herself to Madame Favoral, she said: "Come, mother, come, I feel that I have taken cold. I must go home and think. To-morrow, yes, to-morrow, we will come again."

Deep as Madame Favoral was plunged in her meditations, and a thousand miles as she was from the actual situation, she could not help, however, noticing the intense excitement under which her daughter laboured, the alteration of her features, and the incoherence of her words. "What is the matter?" she asked, somewhat alarmed. "What are you saying?"

"I feel unwell," answered the young girl in a scarcely audible voice, "very unwell. Come, let us go home."

As soon as they reached home, Mademoiselle Gilberte took refuge in her own room. She was in haste to be alone, to recover her self-possession, to collect her thoughts, more scattered than dry leaves by a storm of wind. It was a momentous event which had entered suddenly in her life, hitherto so monotonous and so calm, the consequences of which were likely to considerably influence her future. She almost asked herself if she was not the victim of an hallucination, and if really there was a man who had dared to conceive and execute the audacious project of thus declaring his love, under her mother's eyes, and of asking her in return to enter into a solemn engagement. But what surprised her still more, what she could not understand, was that she had actually submitted to such a proceeding.

Under what despotic influence had she, then, fallen? To what undefinable sentiments had she obeyed? And if she had only tolerated! But she had done more; she had actually encouraged. By detaining her mother when she wished to go home, and she had detained her, had she not intimated to this stranger that he might continue his declarations? And he had continued. And she, at the moment of returning home, had promised to reflect, and to return the next day at a stated hour to give an answer. In a word, she had made an appointment with him. It was enough to make her die of shame. And, as if she had needed the sound of her own words to convince herself of the reality of the fact, she kept repeating aloud: "I have made an appointment, I, Gilberte, with a man whom my parents do not know, and whose name I heard to-day for the first time." But she could not take upon herself to be indignant at the imprudent boldness of her conduct. The bitterness of the reproaches which she was addressing to herself was not sincere. She felt it so well, that she at last exclaimed, "Such hypocrisy is unworthy of me, since even now, though without the excuse of being taken by surprise, I would not act otherwise."

The fact is, the more she pondered, the less she succeeded in discovering even the shadow of any offensive intention in all that Marius de Trégars had said. By the choice of his confidant, an old man, a friend of his family, a man of the highest respectability, he had done all in his power to render his temerity excusable. It was impossible to doubt his sincerity, to suspect the honourability of his intentions. Mademoiselle Gilberte could understand better than almost any other young girl, the extreme measure resorted to by M. de Trégars. By her own pride she could understand his. No more than he would she have been willing to expose herself to a certain refusal, had she been in his place. What was there, then, so extraordinary in the fact of his coming directly to her, and exposing frankly and loyally his position, his projects, and his hopes? "Good heavens!" she thought, horrified at the sentiments which she discovered in the deep recesses of her soul, "good heavens! I hardly know myself. Here I am actually approving what he has done!" Well, yes, she did approve, attracted, fascinated as she was, by the very strangeness of the situation. Nothing seemed to her more admirable than the conduct of Marius de Trégars sacrificing his fortune and his most cherished aspirations to the honour of his name, and condemning himself to work for his living. "That one," thought she, "is a man; and his wife will have just cause to be proud of him." Involuntarily, almost, she compared him to the only men she knew; to M. Favoral, whose excessive niggardliness had made his whole family wretched; to

Maxence, who did not blush to feed his dissipation with the fruits of his mother's and his sister's labour. How different was Marius ! If he was poor, it was of his own will. Had she not seen what confidence he had in himself. She shared it fully. She felt certain, that, within the required delay, he would conquer that indispensable fortune. Then he might present himself boldly. He would take her away from the miserable surroundings among which she seemed fated to live ; she would become the Marchioness de Trégars. " Why, then, not answer, Yes ? " thought she, with the harrowing emotions of the gambler who is about to risk his all upon a card. And what a game for Mademoiselle Gilberte, and what a stake ! Suppose she had been mistaken. Suppose that Marius should turn out to be one of those villains who make a science of seduction. Would she still be her own mistress, after answering ? Did she know to what hazards such an engagement would expose her ? Was she not about rushing blindfolded towards those deceiving perils where a young girl leaves her reputation, even when she saves her honour ? She thought, for a moment, of consulting her mother ; but she knew Madame Favoral's shrinking timidity, and that she was as incapable of giving advice as of upholding her will. She would be frightened, she would approve everything, and then, at the first alarm, she would confess all. " Am I, then, so weak and so foolish," thought Gilberte, " that I cannot by myself take a determination which affects me personally ? "

She could not close her eyes all night ; but in the morning she had made up her mind. Towards one o'clock, she asked, " Are we not going out, mother ? "

Madame Favoral was hesitating. " These early spring days are treacherous," she objected : " you felt cold yesterday."

" My dress was too thin. To-day I have taken my precautions."

They started out, taking their work with them, and went to occupy their accustomed seats.

Before they had even passed the gates of the garden, Mademoiselle Gilberte had recognised Marius de Trégars and the Count de Villegré, walking in one of the side alleys. Soon after, the same as the day before, they took two chairs, and settled themselves not far from the two ladies. Never had the young girl's heart beat with such violence. It is easy enough to form a resolution, but it is not always quite so easy to execute it ; and she was asking herself if she would have courage enough to articulate a word. At last, she said : " You don't believe in dreams, do you, mother ? "

Upon this subject, as well as upon many others, Madame Favoral had no particular opinion.

" Why do you ask me ? " she replied.

" Because I have had such a strange one."

" Oh ! "

" It seemed to me that suddenly a young man, whom I did not know, stood before me. He would have been most happy, said he to me, to ask for my hand ; but he dared not, being very poor. And he begged me to wait three years, during which he would make his fortune."

Madame Favoral smiled and said, " Why, it's quite a romance."

" But it wasn't a romance in my dream," interrupted Mademoiselle Gilberte. " This young man spoke in a tone of such profound conviction, that it was impossible for me, as it were, to doubt him. I thought to myself that he would be incapable of such odious villany as to abuse the confiding credulity of a young girl."

"And what answer did you give him?"

Moving her seat almost imperceptibly, Mademoiselle Gilberte could, from the corner of her eye, have a glimpse of M. de Trégars. Evidently he was not missing a single one of the words which she was addressing to her mother. He was whiter than a sheet, and his face betrayed the most intense anxiety. This gave her sufficient energy to overcome the last revolts of her conscience. "To answer was painful," she said; "and yet I dared to answer him, 'I believe you, and I have faith in you. Loyally and faithfully I will await your success; but until then we must be strangers to one another. To resort to ruse, deceit, and falsehood would be unworthy of us. You surely would not expose to suspicion her who is to be your wife!'"

"That was very well spoken," approved Madame Favoral; "only I did not know you were so romantic."

She was laughing, the good lady, but not loud enough to prevent Gilberte from hearing M. de Trégars's answer. "Count de Villegré," said he, "my old friend, receive the oath which I now take to devote my life to her who has not doubted me. It is to-day the 4th of May, 1870; on the 4th of May, 1873, I shall have succeeded: I feel it, I will it, it must be!"

XV

GILBERTE FAVORAL had just irrevocably disposed of herself. Prosperous or wretched, her destiny henceforth was linked with another. She had set the wheel in motion, and she could no longer hope to control its direction, any more than the will can pretend to alter the course of the ivory ball upon the surface of the roulette-table. At the outset of this great storm of passion which had suddenly surrounded her, she felt an immense surprise, mingled with unexplained apprehensions and vague terrors. Around her, apparently, nothing was changed. Father, mother, brother, friends, gravitated mechanically in their accustomed orbits. The same daily events repeated themselves, monotonous and regular as the tick-tack of the clock. And yet something had occurred more prodigious for her than the moving of a mountain. Often, during the weeks that followed, she repeatedly asked herself, "Is it true, is it possible even?" Or else she would run to a mirror to make sure once more that nothing upon her face or in her eyes betrayed the secret that palpitated within her. The singularity of the situation was, moreover, well calculated to trouble and confound her mind. Mastered by circumstances, she had, in utter disregard of all accepted ideas, and of the commonest propriety, listened to the passionate promises of a stranger, and pledged her life to him. And, the pact concluded and solemnly sworn, they had parted without knowing when propitious circumstances might bring them together again. "And yet," thought she, "before God, M. de Trégars is my betrothed husband; though we have never exchanged a word. Were we to meet in society, we should be compelled to act as strangers to each other: if he passes me in the street, he has no right to bow to me. I know not where he is, how he is, nor what he is doing." And in fact she had not seen him since; he had given no sign of life, so faithfully did he conform to her expressed wish. And perhaps secretly, and without acknowledging it to herself, she may have wished him less scrupulous. Perhaps she would not have been very angry had she seen him sometimes hovering about under the old arcades of the Rue des Vosges.

But, whilst suffering from this separation, she conceived for Marius the highest esteem ; she felt sure that he suffered as much and more than she from the restraint which he imposed upon himself. Thus he was ever present to her thoughts. She never tired of turning over in her mind all he had said of his past life ; she tried to remember his words, and the very tone of his voice. So that by living constantly with the memory of Marius de Trégars, she made herself familiar with him, deceived to that extent by the illusion of absence, that she actually persuaded herself that she knew him better and better every day.

Already nearly a month had elapsed, when one afternoon, as she entered the garden of the Place Royale, she recognised him, standing near that same seat where they had so strangely exchanged their pledges. He saw her coming too ; she knew it by his looks. But, when she had arrived within a few steps of him, he walked off rapidly, leaving a folded newspaper on the seat. Madame Favoral wished to call him back and give it him ; but Gilberte persuaded her not to. "Never mind, mother," said she, "it isn't worth while ; and, besides, the gentleman is too far now." But while getting out her embroidery, she slipped the newspaper into her work-basket, with that dexterity which never fails even the most innocent girls. Was she not certain that it had been left there for her ? As soon as she had returned home, she locked herself up in her room, and, after searching for some time through the columns, she at last came across the following paragraph : "One of the richest and most intelligent manufacturers of Paris, M. Marcolet, has just purchased the vast grounds belonging to the Lacoche estate at Grenelle. He proposes to build thereon a manufactory of chemical products, the management of which is to be placed in the hands of M. de T——. Although still quite young, M. de T—— is well known in connection with his remarkable studies on electricity. He was, perhaps, on the eve of solving the much controverted problem of electricity as a motive-power, when his father's ruin compelled him to suspend his labours. He now seeks to obtain the means of prosecuting his costly experiments."

"Ah ! he does not forget me," thought Gilberte, moved to tears by this article, which, after all, was but a mere puff, written by Marcolet himself, without M. de Trégars's knowledge. She was still under that impression, thinking that Marius was already at work, when her father announced to her that he had discovered a husband, and enjoined her to find him to her liking, as he, the master, thought him all that could be desired. Hence the energy of her refusal.

But hence, also, the imprudent vivacity which had enlightened Madame Favoral, and had made her say, "You are hiding something from me, Gilberte ?" Never had the young girl been so cruelly embarrassed as she was at this moment by this sudden and unforeseen perspicacity. Ought she to confide in her mother ? She felt, indeed, no repugnance to do so, certain as she was, in advance, of the poor woman's inexhaustible indulgence ; and, besides, she would have been delighted to have at last some one with whom she could speak of Marius. But she knew that her father was not the man to give up a project conceived by himself. She knew that he would return to the charge obstinately, without peace, and without truce. And, as she was determined to resist with a no less implacable obstinacy, she foresaw terrible struggles, all sorts of violence and persecution. Informed of the truth, would Madame Favoral have strength enough to resist these daily storms ? Would not a time come, when, called upon by her husband to explain her daughter's refusals, threatened, terrified, she would

confess all? At one glance Gilberte estimated the danger; and, drawing from necessity an audacity which was very foreign to her nature, she replied: "You are mistaken, dear mother, I have concealed nothing from you."

Not quite convinced, Madame Favoral shook her head. "Then," said she, "you will yield."

"Never!"

"Then there must be some reason you do not tell me."

"None, except that I do not wish to leave you. Have you ever thought what your existence would be if I were no longer here? Have you ever asked yourself what would become of you, between my father, whose despotism will grow heavier with age, and my brother?"

Always prompt to defend her son, the mother interrupted: "Maxence is not wicked; he will know how to compensate me for the slight sorrows he has inflicted upon me."

The young girl made a gesture of doubt, "I wish it, dear mother," said she, "with all my heart; but I dare not hope so. His repentance to-night was great and sincere; but will he remember it to-morrow? Besides, don't you know that father has fully resolved to separate himself from Maxence? Think of yourself alone here with father."

Madame Favoral shuddered at the mere idea. "I would not suffer very long," she murmured.

Mademoiselle Gilberte kissed her. "It is because I wish you to live to be happy that I refuse to marry," she exclaimed. "Must you not have your share of happiness in this world? Let me manage. Who knows what compensations the future may have in store for you? Besides, this person whom father has selected for me does not suit me. A stock-jobber, who would think of nothing but money, who would examine my house-accounts as father does yours, or else who would load me with cashmeres and diamonds, like Madame de Thaller, to serve as a sign for his shop? No, no! I will not marry such a man. So, mother dear, be brave, take your daughter's part boldly, and we shall soon be rid of this would-be husband."

"Your father will bring him to see you; he said he would."

"Well, he will be a very courageous man if he returns three times."

At this moment the drawing-room door was opened suddenly, and the irritated voice of the master cried: "What are you two plotting now? And you, Madame Favoral, why don't you come to bed?"

The poor slave obeyed, without saying a word; and as Gilberte went to her room, she thought: "There is trouble ahead; yet if I do have to suffer a little, it won't hurt me. Marius does not complain, though, for my sake, he gives up his dearest hopes, enters the employ of M. Marcolet, he so proud and so disinterested, and thinks of nothing but making money!"

Mademoiselle Gilberte's anticipations were but too soon realised. When M. Favoral made his appearance the next morning, he had the sombre brow and contracted lips of a man who has spent the night ruminating a plan from which he does not mean to swerve. Instead of going to his office, as usual, without saying a word to any one, he called his wife and children into the drawing-room. After having carefully locked all the doors, he said to Maxence: "I want you to give me a list of your creditors. See that you forget none; and let it be ready as soon as possible."

But Maxence was no longer the same. After the well-deserved reproaches of his sister, a salutary change had taken place in him. During the preceding night, he had reflected over his conduct of the past four years; and he had been dismayed and terrified. His impression had been like that of

the drunkard, who, having become sober, remembers the ridiculous or degrading acts which he has committed while under the influence of alcohol, and, confused and humiliated, swears to reform. Thus Maxence had sworn to himself to change his mode of life, promising that it should be no drunkard's oath, either. His attitude and his look showed the pride of a great resolution. Instead of lowering his eyes before M. Favoral's irritated glance, and stammering excuses and vague promises, he replied: "It is useless, father, to give you the list you ask for. I am old enough to bear the responsibility of my acts. I will repair my follies: what I owe, I will pay. This very day, I will see my creditors, and make arrangements with them."

"Very well, Maxence," exclaimed Madame Favoral, delighted.

But there was no pacifying the old cashier. "That is all very fine," he said with a sneer; "but I doubt if the tailors and the shirt-makers will be satisfied, I insist therefore upon having that list."

"Still—"

"It's I who shall pay. I do not intend to have another scene like that of yesterday in my office. It must not be said that my son is a swindler at the very moment when I find a most unhopd-for match for my daughter. For I suppose you have got over your foolish ideas," said he, turning to Mademoiselle Gilberte.

The young girl shook her head, and replied: "My ideas are the same as they were last night."

"Ah, ah!"

"And so, father, I beg of you, do not insist. Why wrangle and quarrel? You must know me well enough to feel sure, that, whatever may happen, I shall never yield."

Indeed, M. Favoral was well aware of his daughter's firmness; for he had already been compelled on several occasions, as he himself expressed it, "to strike his flag" before her. But he could not believe that she would resist when he took certain means of enforcing his will.

"I have pledged my word," he said.

"But I have not pledged mine, father."

He was becoming excited; his cheeks were flushed, and his little eyes sparkled. "And suppose I were to tell you," he resumed, doing his daughter at least the honour of controlling his anger, "suppose I were to tell you that this marriage would procure me immense, positive, and immediate advantages?"

"Oh!" she interrupted with a look of disgust, "oh, for mercy's sake!"

"Suppose I were to tell you that I have a great desire for it; that it is indispensable to the success of vast combinations?"

Mademoiselle Gilberte looked straight at him. "I would answer you," she exclaimed, "that it does not suit me to be made use of as an earnest to your combinations. Ah! it's an operation, is it? an enterprise, a big speculation? and you throw your daughter into the bargain as a sort of bonus. Well, no! You can tell your partner that the affair has fallen through."

M. Favoral's anger was growing with each word. "I'll see if I can't make you yield," he cried.

"You may crush me, perhaps. Make me yield, never!"

"Well, we shall see. You shall see!—Maxence and you—whether there are no means by which a father can compel his rebellious children to submit to his authority." And, feeling that he was no longer master of himself, he left the room, swearing he would be obeyed.

Maxence shook with indignation. "Never," he exclaimed, "never until now, have I understood the infamy of my conduct. With a father such as ours, Gilberte, I should be your protector. And now I have no right even to interfere. But wait a little, I am determined that all shall soon be repaired."

Left alone, a few moments after, Gilberte congratulated herself upon her firmness. "I am sure," thought she, "Marius would approve, if he knew." She had not long to wait for her reward. The bell rang: it was her old professor, Signor Gismondo Pulci, who came to give her her daily lesson. The liveliest joy beamed upon his countenance, more shrivelled than an apple at Easter; and the most splendid anticipations sparkled in his eyes. "I knew it, signorina!" he exclaimed from the threshold: "I knew that angels bring good luck. As everything succeeds to you, so must everything succeed to those who come near you."

She could not help smiling at the appropriateness of the compliment. "Something fortunate has happened to you, dear master?" she asked.

"That is to say, I am on the high road to fortune and glory," he replied. "My fame is extending; pupils dispute the privilege of sharing my lessons."

Mademoiselle Gilberte knew too well the thoroughly Italian exaggeration of the worthy *maestro* to be at all surprised.

"This morning," he continued, "I had risen early, and I was working with marvellous facility, when there was a knock at my door. I do not remember such an occurrence since the blessed day when your worthy father called for me. Surprised, I nevertheless cried, 'Come in;' when there appeared a tall and robust young man, proud and intelligent-looking."

The young girl started. "Marius!" cried a voice within her.

"This young man," continued the old Italian, "had heard me spoken of, and came to apply for lessons. I questioned him; and from the first words I discovered that his education had been frightfully neglected, that he was ignorant of the most vulgar notions of the divine art, and that he scarcely knew the difference between a sharp and a quaver. It was really the A, B, C, which he wished me to teach him. Laborious task, ungrateful labour! But he manifested so much shame at his ignorance, and so much desire to be instructed, that I felt moved in his favour. Then his countenance was most winning, his voice of a superior tone; and finally he offered me sixty francs a month. In short, he is now my pupil."

As well as she could, Mademoiselle Gilberte was hiding her blushes behind a music-book.

"We remained over two hours talking," said the good and simple *maestro*, "and I believe that he has a great inclination to learn. Unfortunately, he can only take two lessons a week. Although a nobleman, he works: and, when he took off his glove to hand me a month's salary in advance, I noticed that one of his hands was blackened, and as if burnt by some acid. But never mind, signorina, sixty francs a month, together with what your worthy father gives me, is a fortune. The end of my career will be spared the privations of its commencement. The sunrise was overcast: but the sunset will be glorious."

The young girl could no longer have any doubts: M. de Trégars had found the means of hearing of her, and letting her hear of him. The impression she felt contributed no little to give her sufficient patience to endure her father's obstinate persecution; for he never failed to say to her, at least

twice a day: "Get ready to properly receive your intended on Saturday. I have not invited him to dinner; he will only spend the evening with us." And he mistook for a disposition to yield the cold tone in which she answered,—“I beg you to believe that this introduction is wholly unnecessary.”

Thus, the famous day having come, he said to his usual Saturday guests, M. and Madame Desclavettes, M. Chapelain, and old Desormeaux: "Eh, eh! you will probably see a future son-in-law!" At nine o'clock, just as they had passed into the drawing-room, the sound of carriage-wheels startled the Rue St. Gilles. "There he is!" exclaimed the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank. And, throwing open a window,—“Come, Gilberte,” he added, “come and see his carriage and horses.”

She never stirred; but M. Desclavettes and M. Chapelain both ran and looked out. It was dark, unfortunately, and of the whole equipage nothing was visible but the two lanterns that shone like stars. Almost at the same time the drawing-room door was opened, and the servant, who had been properly trained in advance, announced: “M. Costeclar.”

Leaning towards Madame Favoral, who was seated by her side on the sofa, Madame Desclavettes whispered: “A nice-looking man, isn't he? a very nice-looking man.”

And indeed he really thought so himself. Gesture, attitude, smile, everything in M. Costeclar, betrayed the satisfaction of self, and the assurance of a man accustomed to success. His head, which was very small, had but little hair left; but what there was was artistically drawn towards the temples, parted in the middle, and cut short around the forehead. His leaden complexion, his pale lips, and his dull eyes, did not certainly betray a very rich blood; he had too a great long nose, sharp and curved like a sickle; and his beard, of undecided colour, trimmed in the Victor Emmanuel style, did the greatest honour to the barber who cultivated it. Even when seen for the first time, one might fancy one recognised him, so exactly was he like three or four hundred others who are seen daily in the neighbourhood of the Café Riche; who are met everywhere where people who pretend to amuse themselves congregate: at the Bourse, or in the Bois de Boulogne; on first nights at the theatres, where they are just enough hidden to be perfectly well seen at the backs of boxes filled with young ladies with astonishing chignons; at the races, in carriages where they drink champagne to the health of the winner. He had on this occasion assumed his best looks, and donned his full dress: dress-coat with wide sleeves, shirt cut low in the neck, and open waistcoat fastened below the waist by a single button.

“Quite a man of the world,” again remarked Madame Desclavettes.

M. Favoral rushed towards him, but he, hastening, met the cashier half-way, and, taking both his hands in his, “I cannot tell you, dear friend,” he commenced, “how deeply I feel the honour you do me in receiving me in the midst of your charming family and your worthy friends.” And he bowed all round during his speech, which he delivered in the condescending tone of a lord visiting his inferiors.

“Let me introduce you to my wife,” interrupted the cashier. And, leading him towards Madame Favoral, “M. Costeclar, my dear,” he continued, “the friend of whom we have so often spoken.”

M. Costeclar bowed, rounding his shoulders, bending his lean form in a half-circle, and letting his arms hang forward. “I am too much the friend of our dear Favoral, madame,” he said, “not to have heard of you long

since, nor to know your merits, and the fact that he owes to you that peaceful happiness which he enjoys, and which we all envy him."

Standing by the mantelpiece, the usual Saturday-evening guests followed with the liveliest interest the evolutions of the pretender. Two of them, M. Chapelain and old Desormeaux, were perfectly able to appreciate him at his just value; but, in affirming that he made half a million a year, M. Favoral had, as it were, thrown over his shoulders that famous ducal cloak which concealed all deformities. Without waiting for his wife's answer, M. Favoral brought his friend in front of Mademoiselle Gilberte. "Dear daughter," said he, "M. Costeclar, the friend of whom I have spoken."

M. Costeclar bowed still lower, and rounded off his shoulders again; but the young lady looked at him from head to foot with such a freezing glance, that his tongue remained as if paralysed in his mouth, and he could only stammer out, "Mademoiselle!—the honour—the humblest of your admirers—"

Fortunately Maxence was standing three steps off; he fell back in good order upon him, and seizing his hand, which he shook vigorously, "I hope, my dear sir, that we shall soon be quite intimate friends. Your excellent father, whose special concern you are, has often spoken to me of you. Events, so he has confided to me, have not hitherto responded to your expectations. At your age, this is not a very grave matter. People, now-a-days, do not always find at the first attempt the road that leads to fortune. You will find yours. From this time forth I place at your disposal my influence and my experience; and, if you will consent to take me for your guide—"

Maxence had withdrawn his hand. "I am very much obliged to you, sir," he answered coldly; "but I am content with my lot, and I believe myself old enough to walk alone."

Almost any one would have lost countenance. But M. Costeclar was so little put out, that it seemed as though he had expected just such a reception. He turned upon his heels, and advanced towards M. Favoral's friends with a smile so engaging as to make it evident that he was anxious to gain their suffrages. This was at the beginning of the month of June, 1870. No one as yet could foresee the frightful disasters which were to mark the end of that fatal year. And yet there was everywhere in France that indefinable anxiety which precedes great social convulsions. The plebiscitum had not succeeded in restoring confidence. Every day the most alarming rumours were put in circulation; and it was with a sort of passion that people went in quest of news. Now, M. Costeclar was a wonderfully well-posted man. He had, doubtless, on his way, stopped on the Boulevard des Italiens, at that spot where the street-brokers labour nightly for the financial prosperity of the country. He had looked into the Passage de l'Opéra, which is, as is well known, the best market for the most correct and the most reliable news. Therefore he might safely be believed. Placing his back to the mantelpiece, he took the lead in the conversation; and he kept talking, talking, talking. Being a "bull," he took a favourable view of everything. He believed in the eternity of the Second Empire. He sang the praises of the new cabinet; he was ready to shed his blood for Emile Ollivier. True, some people complained that business was dull and slow; but those people, he thought, were merely "bears." Business had never been so brilliant. At no time had prosperity been greater. Capital was abundant. Securities were rising. Everybody's pockets were full to bursting. And the others listened in astonishment to this inexhaustible

prattle, this "gab," more laden with gold spangles than Dantzig cordial, with which the commercial travellers of the Bourse catch their customers. Suddenly,—“But you must excuse me,” he said, rushing towards the other end of the drawing-room. Madame Favoral had just gone out to order tea to be brought in; and, the seat next to Mademoiselle Gilberte being vacant, M. Costeclar occupied it promptly.

“He understands his business,” growled M. Desormeaux.

“Really,” said M. Desclavettes, “if I had some funds to dispose of just now—”

“I would be most happy to have him for my son-in-law,” declared M. Favoral.

He was doing his best. Somewhat intimidated by Mademoiselle Gilberte's first look, he had now fully recovered his wits. He commenced by sketching his own portrait. He had just turned thirty, and had experienced the strong and the weak side of life. He had had successes, but had tired of them. Having gauged the emptiness of what is called pleasure, he only wished now to find a partner for life, whose grace and virtue would secure his domestic happiness. He could not help noticing the absent look of the young girl; but he had, thought he, other means of compelling her attention. And he went on, saying that he felt himself cast of the metal of which model husbands are made. His plans were all made in advance. His wife would be free to do as she pleased. She would have her own carriage and horses, her box at the Italian opera, and an open account at Worth's and Van Klopen's. As to diamonds, he would see to them. He meant that his wife's display of wealth should be noticed, and even spoken of in the newspapers.

Were these the terms of a bargain that he was offering? If so, he did it so coarsely, that Gilberte, ignorant of life as she was, wondered in what world it might be that he had met with his successes. And, somewhat indignantly, she said: “Unfortunately, the Bourse is perfidious; and the man who drives his own carriage to-day may have no shoes to wear to-morrow.”

M. Costeclar nodded with a smile. “Exactly so,” said he. “A marriage protects one against such reverses.”

“Ah?”

“When a man in active business marries, he settles upon his wife a reasonable fortune. I intend to settle six hundred thousand francs upon mine.”

“So that, if you were to meet with an—accident?”

“We should enjoy our thirty thousand francs a year in spite of the creditors.”

Blushing with shame, Mademoiselle Gilberte rose. “But then,” said she, “it is not a wife that you are looking for, it is an accomplice!”

He was spared the embarrassment of an answer, by the entrance of the servant, bringing in tea. He accepted a cup; and after two or three anecdotes, judging that he had done enough for a first visit, he withdrew, and a moment later they heard his carriage driving off at full gallop.

XVI.

It was not without mature thought that M. Costeclar had determined to withdraw, in spite of M. Favoral's pressing entreaties to remain. However

infatuated he might be with his own merits, he had been compelled to surrender to evidence, and to acknowledge that he had not exactly succeeded with Mademoiselle Gilberte. But he also knew that he had the head of the family on his side; and he flattered himself that he had produced an excellent impression upon the guests of the house. "Therefore," had he said to himself, "if I leave first, they will sing my praises, lecture the young lady, and make her listen to reason." He was not far from being right. Madame Desclavettes had been completely subjugated by the grand manners of this suitor; and M. Desclavettes did not hesitate to affirm that he had rarely met any one who pleased him more. The others, M. Chapelain and old Desormeaux, did not, doubtless, share this optimism; but M. Costeclar's annual half-million singularly obscured their perspicacity. They may have thought they had discovered in him some alarming features; yet they had such full and entire confidence in their friend Favoral's prudent sagacity, that they did not entertain them for long. The particular and methodic cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank was not apt to be enthusiastic; and, if he opened the doors of his house to a young man, if he was so anxious to have him for his son-in-law, he must evidently have taken ample information. Finally, there are certain family matters from which sensible people keep away as they would from the plague; and, in a question of marriage especially, he is a bold man who would take side for or against.

Thus Madame Desclavettes was the only one to raise her voice on the subject. Taking Gilberte's hands within hers, she said: "Let me scold you, my dear, for having received thus a poor young man who was only trying to please you."

Excepting her mother, too weak to take her defence, and her brother, who was debarred from interfering, the young girl readily understood, that, in that room, every one was overtly or tacitly against her. The idea came to her mind to repeat there boldly what she had already told her father, that she was resolved not to marry, and that she would not marry, not being one of those weak girls, without energy, who are dressed in white, and dragged to church against their will. Such a bold declaration would be in keeping with her character. But she feared a terrible, and perhaps degrading scene. The most intimate friends of the family were ignorant of its most painful sores. In presence of his guests, M. Favoral dissembled, speaking in a mild voice, and assuming a kindly smile. Should she suddenly reveal the truth?

"It is childish of you to run the risk of discouraging a clever fellow who makes half a million a year," continued the wife of the old bronze-merchant, to whom such conduct seemed an abominable crime against money.

Mademoiselle Gilberte had withdrawn her hands. "You did not hear what he said, madame."

"I beg your pardon: I was quite near, and involuntarily—"

"You heard his—propositions?"

"Perfectly. He was promising you a carriage, a box at the opera, diamonds, freedom. Isn't that the dream of all young ladies?"

"It is not mine, madame!"

"Dear me! What else can you wish? You must not expect more from a husband than he can possibly give."

"That is not what I should expect of him."

"She is mad," suggested M. Favoral in a tone of paternal indulgence, which his looks belied.

Tears of indignation filled Gilberte's eyes. "Madame Desclavettes," she exclaimed, "forgets something. She forgets that this gentleman dared to tell me that he intends to settle upon the woman he marries a large fortune, of which his creditors would thus be cheated should he fail in business."

She thought, in her simplicity, that a cry of indignation would rise at these words. Instead of which, M. Desclavettes observed: "Well, isn't it perfectly natural!"

"It seems to me more than natural," insisted Madame Desclavettes, "that a man should be anxious to preserve his wife and children from ruin."

"Of course?" put in M. Favoral.

"Have you, then, taken such precautions yourself?" asked Gilberte, stepping resolutely towards her father.

"No," answered the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank. And, after a moment of hesitation, he added: "But I am running no risks. In business, and when a man may be ruined by a mere rise or fall in stocks, he would be insane indeed did he not secure bread for his family, and above all, means for himself, wherewith to commence again. The Baron de Thaller did not act otherwise; and, should he meet with a disaster, Madame de Thaller would still have a handsome fortune."

M. Desormeaux was, perhaps, the only one not to admit that theory freely, and not to accept that ever-decisive reason, "Others do it." But he was a philosopher, and thought it silly not to be of his time. He therefore contented himself with saying: "H'm! M. de Thaller's creditors might not think that mode of proceeding entirely regular."

"Then they might sue," said M. Chapelain, laughing. "People can always sue; only when the documents are well drawn up—"

Gilberte stood dismayed. She thought of Marius de Trégars giving up his mother's fortune to pay his father's debts. "What would he say," thought she, "should he hear such opinions!"

The cashier resumed: "I most decidedly blame every species of fraud. But I pretend, and I maintain, that a man who has worked twenty years to give a handsome dowry to his daughter, has the right to demand of his son-in-law certain conservative measures to guarantee the money which, after all, is his own, and which should benefit none but his own family."

This declaration put an end to the discussion. It was getting late. The Saturday guests put on their overcoats; and, as they were walking home, Madame Desclavettes observed: "Can you understand that little Gilberte? I'd like to see a daughter of mine have such fancies! But her poor mother is so weak!"

"Yes; but friend Favoral is firm enough for both," interrupted M. Desormeaux; "and it is more than probable that at this very moment he is correcting his daughter for the sin of idleness."

But he was mistaken. Extremely angry as M. Favoral must have been, neither that evening, nor the next day, did he make the remotest allusion to what had taken place. The following Monday only, before leaving for his office, casting upon his wife and daughter one of his ugliest looks, he said: "M. Costeclar owes us a visit, and it is possible that he may call in my absence. I wish him to be admitted; and I forbid you to go out, so that you can have no pretext to refuse him the door. I presume there will not be found in my house any one bold enough to ill receive a man whom I like, and whom I have selected for my son-in-law."

But was it probable, was it even possible, that M. Costeclar could venture upon such a step after Mademoiselle Gilberte's treatment of him on the previous Saturday evening? "No, a thousand times no!" affirmed Maxence to his mother and sister. "So you may rest easy."

Indeed they tried to, until that very afternoon the sound of rapidly-rolling wheels attracted Madame Favoral to the window. A brougham, drawn by two gray horses, had just stopped at the door. "It is he," she said to her daughter.

Mademoiselle Gilberte turned slightly pale. "There is no help for it, mother," she said: "you must receive him."

"And you?"

"I shall remain in my room."

"Do you suppose he won't ask for you?"

"You will answer that I am unwell. He will understand."

"But your father, unhappy child, your father?"

"I do not acknowledge to my father the right of disposing of my person against my wishes. I detest the man to whom he wishes to marry me. Would you like to see me his wife, to know me given up to the most intolerable torture? No, there is no violence in the world that will ever wring my consent from me. So, mother dear, do what I ask you. My father can say what he pleases; I take the whole responsibility upon myself."

There was no time to argue: the bell rang. Gilberte was just able to escape through one of the doors of the drawing-room, whilst M. Costeclar was entering by the other.

If he did have enough perspicacity to guess what had just taken place, he did not show it in any way. He sat down; and it was only after conversing for a few moments upon indifferent subjects, that he asked how Mademoiselle Gilberte was.

"She is not very well," stammered Madame Favoral.

He did not appear surprised; but only said: "Our dear Favoral will be still more pained than I am when I tell him of this mishap."

Better than any other mother, Madame Favoral must have understood and approved Gilberte's invincible repugnance. To her also, when she was young, her father had come one day, and said, "I have discovered a husband for you." She had accepted him blindly. Bruised and wounded by daily outrages, she had sought refuge in marriage as in a haven of safety. And, ever since, hardly a day had elapsed that she had not thought it would have been better for her to have died rather than to have riveted to her neck those fetters that death alone can remove. She thought, therefore, that her daughter was perfectly right. And yet twenty years of slavery had so weakened the springs of her energy, that, under the glance of M. Costeclar, who threatened her with her husband's name, she felt embarrassed, and could scarcely stammer some timid excuses. And she allowed him to prolong his visit, and consequently her own torment, for over half-an-hour; then, when he had gone, she said to her daughter: "He and your father understand each other, that is but too evident. What is the use of struggling?"

A fugitive blush coloured Gilberte's pale cheeks. For the past forty-eight hours she had been seeking an issue to an impossible situation; and she had accustomed her mind to the worst eventualities. "Do you wish me, then, to desert the paternal roof?" she exclaimed.

Madame Favoral almost dropped on the floor. "You would run away," she stammered, "you!"

"Rather than become that man's wife, yes!"

"And where would you go, unfortunate child? what would you do?"

"I can earn my living."

Madame Favoral shook her head sadly. The same suspicions that she had felt once before were reviving within her. "Gilberte," she said in a beseeching tone, "am I, then, no longer your best friend? and will you not tell me from what sources you draw your courage and your resolution?" And, as her daughter said nothing, "God alone knows what may happen!" sighed the poor woman.

Nothing happened, but what could have been easily foreseen. When M. Favoral came home to dinner, he was whistling a perfect storm as he mounted the stairs. He abstained at first from all recrimination; but towards the end of the meal, with the most sarcastic look he could assume, "It seems," he said to his daughter, "that you were unwell this afternoon?"

Bravely, and without flinching, she sustained his look; and, in a firm voice, she replied: "I shall always be indisposed when M. Costeclar calls. You understand me, father, do you not—always!"

But the cashier was not one of those men whose wrath finds vent in mere sarcasms. Rising suddenly to his feet,—“By the holy heavens!” he screamed forth, “you are wrong to trifle thus with my will; for, all of you here, I shall crush you as I do this glass.” And, with a frenzied gesture, he dashed the glass he held in his hand against the wall, where it broke in a thousand pieces. Trembling like a leaf, Madame Favoral staggered upon her chair.

"Better kill her at once," said Mademoiselle Gilberte coldly. "She would suffer less."

It was by a torrent of invective that M. Favoral replied. His rage, dammed up for the past four days, finding at last an outlet, flowed in gross insults and insane threats. He spoke of turning his wife and children into the street, or starving them out, or shutting up his daughter in a house of correction; until at last, language failing his fury, and utterly beside himself, he left, swearing that he himself would bring M. Costeclar back, and then they would see.

"Very well, we shall see," said Mademoiselle Gilberte.

Motionless in his place, and white as a plaster cast, Maxence had witnessed this lamentable scene. A gleam of common-sense had enabled him to control his indignation, and to remain silent. He had understood, that, at the first word, his father's fury would have turned all against him; and then what might have happened? The most frightful dramas of the criminal courts have often had no other origin. "No, this is no longer bearable!" he exclaimed. Even at the time of his greatest follies, Maxence had always entertained a great affection for his sister. He admired her from the day she had stood up before him to reproach him for his misconduct. He envied her her quiet determination, her patient tenacity, and that calm energy that never failed her. "Have patience, my poor Gilberte," he said: "the day is not far, I hope, when I may commence to repay you all you have done for me. I have not lost my time since you restored me to reason. I have arranged with my creditors. I have found a situation, which, if not brilliant, is at least sufficiently lucrative to enable me before long to offer you, as well as to our mother, a peaceful retreat."

"But it is to-morrow," interrupted Madame Favoral, "to-morrow that your father is to bring M. Costeclar. He said so, and he will do it."

And so he did. About two o'clock in the afternoon M. Favoral and his

friend arrived in the Rue St. Gilles, in that famous brougham with the two horses, which excited the wonder of the neighbours. But Gilberte had her plan ready. She was on the look-out; and, as soon as she heard the carriage stop, she ran to her room, undressed in a twinkling, and went to bed. When her father came for her, and saw her in bed, he stopped surprised and puzzled at the threshold of the room. "You will come into the drawing-room!" he said in a hoarse voice.

"Then you must carry me there as I am," she replied in a tone of defiance; "for I shall certainly not get up."

For the first time since his marriage, M. Favoral encountered in his own house a more inflexible will than his own, and a more unyielding obstinacy. He was baffled. He threatened his daughter with his clinched fists, but could discover no means of making her obey. He was compelled to surrender, to yield. "This shall be settled with the rest," he growled, as he went out.

"I fear nothing in the world, father," said the girl.

It was almost true, so much did the thought of Marius de Trégars inflame her courage. Twice already she had heard from him through Signor Gismondo Pulci, who never tired of talking of his new pupil, to whom he had already given two lessons. "He is the most gallant man in the world," he said, his eyes sparkling with enthusiasm, "and the bravest, and the most generous, and the best; and no quality that can adorn one of God's creatures shall be wanting in him when I have taught him the divine art. It is not with a little contemptible gold that he means to reward my zeal. To him I am as a second father; and it is with the confidence of a son that he explains to me his labours and his hopes."

Thus Mademoiselle Gilberte learned, through the old maestro, that the newspaper article she had read was almost exactly true, and that M. de Trégars and M. Marcholet had become associated for the purpose of working, in joint account, certain recent discoveries, which bid fair to yield large profits in a near future. "And yet it is for my sake alone that he has thus thrown himself into the turmoil of business, and has become as eager for gain as M. Marcholet himself," thought Gilberte. And, at the height of her father's persecutions, she felt glad of what she had done, and of her boldness in placing her destiny in the hands of a stranger. Her recollection of Marius had become her refuge, the element of all her dreams and of all her hopes; in a word, her life. It was of Marius she was thinking, when her mother, surprising her gazing into vacancy, would ask her, "What are you thinking of?" And, at every new vexation she had to endure, her imagination decked him with a new quality, and she clung to him with a more desperate grasp. "How much he would grieve," said she to herself, "if he knew of what persecution I am the object!" And very careful was she not to allow Signor Gismondo Pulci to suspect anything of it, affecting, on the contrary, in his presence, the most cheerful serenity. And yet she was a prey to the most cruel anxiety, since she noticed a new and most incredible transformation in her father. That man, so violent and so harsh, who flattered himself never to have been bent, who boasted never to have forgotten or forgiven anything, that domestic tyrant, had become quite a debonair personage. He referred to the expedient imagined by Gilberte only to laugh at it, saying that it was a good trick, and he deserved it; for he repented bitterly, he protested, his past brutalities. He owned that he had at heart his daughter's marriage with M. Costeclar; but he acknowledged that he had made use of the surest means for making it fail. He ought, he

humbly confessed, to have expected everything of time and circumstances, of M. Costeclar's excellent qualities, and of his beautiful, darling daughter's good sense.

This affected good nature terrified Madame Favoral more than all his violence. "Dear me!" sighed she, "what is he going to do now?"

XVII.

THE cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank, however, was not preparing any new surprise for his family. Though the means were different, it was still the same end that he was pursuing with the tenacity of an insect. Where severity had failed, he hoped to succeed by gentleness, and that was all. Only this assumption of hypocritical meekness was too sudden to deceive any one. Every now and then the mask fell off, the claws showed, and his voice trembled with ill-suppressed rage in the midst of his most honeyed phrases. Moreover, he entertained the strangest illusions. Because for forty-eight hours he had acted the part of a good-natured man, because one Sunday he had taken his wife and daughter out for a drive in the Bois de Vincennes, because he had given Maxence a hundred-franc note, he imagined that all was over, that the past was obliterated, forgotten, and forgiven. And, drawing Gilberte upon his knees, he said: "Well, little girl, you see that I don't importune you any more, and I leave you quite free. I am more reasonable than you are."

But on the other hand, and according to an expression which escaped him later on, he was trying to outflank the enemy. He did everything in his power to spread in the neighbourhood the rumour of Mademoiselle Gilberte's marriage with a financier of colossal wealth, that elegant young man who always came in a brougham drawn by two horses. Madame Favoral could not enter a shop without being covertly complimented upon having found such a splendid match for her daughter.

Loud, indeed, must have been the gossip, for its echo reached even the inattentive ears of Signor Gismondo Pulci. One day, suddenly interrupting his lesson, he observed: "You are going to be married, signorina?"

Mademoiselle Gilberte started. What the old Italian had heard, he would surely ere long repeat to Marius. It was therefore urgent to undeceive him. "It is true," she replied, "that something has been said about a marriage, dear maestro."

"Ah, ah!"

"Only my father had not consulted me. That marriage will never take place; I swear it." She expressed herself in a tone of such ardent conviction, that the old gentleman was quite astonished, little dreaming that it was not to him that this energetic denial was addressed. "My destiny is irrevocably fixed," added Mademoiselle Gilberte. "When I marry I shall consult only the inspirations of my heart."

However, a regular conspiracy was formed against her. M. Favoral had succeeded in interesting his habitual guests in the success of his designs; not only M. and Madame Desclavettes, who had been seduced from the first, but M. Chapelain and old Desormeaux himself. So that they all vied with each other in their efforts to bring the "dear child" to reason, and to enlighten her with their counsels. "Father must have a greater interest in this alliance than he has allowed us to think," she remarked to her brother.

Maxence was absolutely of the same opinion. "And then," he added, "our father must be terribly rich ; for, do not deceive yourself, it isn't solely for your pretty blue eyes that this Costeclar persists in coming here twice a week to pocket a fresh mortification. What enormous dowry can he be hoping for ? I am going to speak to him myself, and try to find out what he is after."

Mademoiselle Gilberte though had but slight confidence in her brother's diplomacy. "I beg of you," she said, "don't meddle with this business !"

"Yes, yes, I will ! Fear nothing, I'll be prudent."

Having formed this resolution, Maxence placed himself on the look-out ; and the very next day, as M. Costeclar was stepping out of his carriage at the door, he walked straight up to him. "I wish to speak to you, sir," he said.

Self-possessed as he was, the brilliant financier succeeded but poorly in concealing a surprise that looked very much like fright. "I am going in to call on your parents, sir," he replied : "and whilst waiting for your father, with whom I have an appointment, I shall be at your commands."

"No, no !" interrupted Maxence. "What I have to say must be heard by you alone. Come along this way, and we shall not be interrupted."

And he led M. Costeclar away as far as the Place Royale. Once there,—
"You are very anxious to marry my sister, sir," he commenced.

During their short walk, M. Costeclar had recovered himself. He had regained all his impertinent assurance. Looking at Maxence from head to foot with anything but a friendly look, he replied : "It is my dearest and my most ardent wish, sir."

"Very well. But you must have noticed the very slight success, to use no harsher term, of your assiduities."

"Alas !"

"And, perhaps, you will think, like myself, that it would be the act of a gentleman to withdraw in presence of such positive—repugnance?"

An ugly smile was wandering upon M. Costeclar's pale lips. "Is it at the request of your sister, sir, that you make this communication?"

"No, sir."

"Are you aware whether your sister has some prior attachment that may be an obstacle to the realisation of my hopes !"

"Sir !"

"Excuse me ! My words are in no way offensive. It might very well be that your sister, before I had the honour of being introduced to her, had already made her choice."

He spoke so loud, that Maxence looked sharply round to see whether there was no one within hearing. He only saw a young man, who seemed quite absorbed in reading a newspaper. "But, sir," he resumed, "what would you answer, if I, the brother of the young lady, whom you wish to marry against her wishes, called upon you to cease your attentions?"

M. Costeclar bowed ceremoniously. "I would answer you, sir," he replied, "that your father's assent is sufficient for me. My suit is strictly honourable. Your sister may not like me : that is a misfortune ; but it is not irreparable. When she knows me better, I venture to hope that she will overcome her unjust prejudices. Therefore I shall persist."

Maxence said no more. He was irritated at M. Costeclar's coolness ; but it was not his intention to push things further. "There will always be time," he thought, "to resort to violent measures." But when he reported this conversation to his sister,—
"It is clear," he said, "that, between our

father and that man, there is a community of interests which I am unable to discover. What business have they together? In what respect can your marriage either help or injure them? I must look about, try and find out exactly who this Costeclar is: the deuce take him!"

He made his inquiries the same day, and had not far to go. M. Costeclar was one of those personalities which only bloom in Paris, and are only met with there. He knew everybody, and everybody knew him. He was well known on the Bourse, in all the principal restaurants, where he called the waiters by their christian names, at the box-offices of the theatres, at all the betting agencies, and at the Cercle Européen, otherwise called the Club des Nomades, of which he was a member. He operated on the Bourse, that much was certain. He was said to own a third share in a stock-broker's office. He did a good deal of business with M. Jottras, of the firm of Jottras Brothers, and also with Saint-Pavin, the editor of a very popular journal, "The Financial Pilot." It was further known that he had a magnificent apartment in the Rue Vivienne, and that he had successively honoured with his liberal protection Mademoiselle Sydney of the Théâtre des Variétés, and Madame Jenny Fancy, a lady of a certain age already, but so situated as to return to her lovers in the form of notoriety what they gave her in coin of the realm. Maxence learnt this much without difficulty. As to any more precise details, it was impossible to obtain them. To his pressing questions respecting M. Costeclar's antecedents: "He is a very honest man," answered some. "He is simply a speculator," affirmed others. But all agreed that he was a sharp fellow who would surely make his fortune, and without passing through the police-courts, either. "How can our father and such a man be so intimately connected?" wondered Maxence and his sister.

And they were lost in conjectures, when suddenly, at an hour when he never set his foot in the house, M. Favoral appeared. Throwing a letter upon his daughter's lap, he said in a hoarse voice,—“See what I have just received from Costeclar. Read.”

She read as follows: "Allow me, dear friend, to release you from your engagement. Owing to circumstances absolutely beyond my control, I find myself compelled to forego the honour of becoming a member of your family."

What could have happened? Standing in the middle of the drawing-room, the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank held his wife and children bowed down beneath his glance: Madame Favoral trembling, Maxence staring in mute surprise, and Gilberte, who needed all the strength of her will to control the explosion of her boundless joy. Everything in M. Favoral, however, betrayed much more the excitement of a disaster than the rage of a deception. Never had his family seen him thus,—livid, his cravat undone, his hair wet with perspiration, and clinging to his temples. "Will you please explain this letter?" he asked at last. And, as no one answered him, he took the letter up again from the table where Gilberte had laid it, and commenced reading it again, scanning each syllable, as if in hopes of discovering in every word some hidden meaning. "What have you said to Costeclar?" he resumed, "what have you done to him to make him take such a determination?"

"Nothing," answered both Maxence and Gilberte.

The hope of being at last rid of that man inspired Madame Favoral with something like courage. "He doubtless understood," she meekly suggested, "that he could not triumph over our daughter's repugnance."

But her husband interrupted her,—“No,” he exclaimed, “Costeclar is not the man to trouble himself about a little girl’s ridiculous caprices. There is something else. But what? Come, if you know it, any of you, if you even only suspect it, speak, tell me. You must see that I am in a fearful state of anxiety.” It was the first time that he thus allowed anything to appear of what was passing within him, the first time that he ever complained.

“M. Costeclar alone, father, can give you the explanation you ask of us,” said Mademoiselle Gilberte.

The cashier shook his head. “Do you suppose, then, that I have not questioned him? I found his letter this morning at the office. I at once hurried to his apartments in the Rue Vivienne. He had just gone out; and it was in vain that I called for him at Jottras’, and at the office of ‘The Financial Pilot.’ I found him at last at the Bourse, after seeking for him during three hours. But he would only give me evasive answers and vague explanations. Of course he did not fail to say, that, if he withdraws, it is because he despairs of ever succeeding in pleasing Gilberte. But it isn’t so: I know it, I am sure of it, I read it in his eyes. Twice his lips moved as if he were about to confess all; and then he said nothing. And, the more I insisted, the more he seemed ill at ease, embarrassed, uneasy, troubled, the more he appeared to me like a man who has been threatened, and dares not brave the threat.” He directed upon his children one of those obstinate looks which search the inmost depths of a conscience.

“If you have done anything to drive him off,” he resumed, “confess it frankly, and I swear I will not reproach you.”

“We did not.”

“You did not threaten him?”

“No!”

M. Favoral seemed appalled. “Doubtless you deceive me,” he said, “and I hope you do. Unhappy children! you do not know what this rupture may cost you.” And, instead of returning to his office, he shut himself up in that little room which he called his study, and only came out of it at about five o’clock, holding under his arm an enormous bundle of papers, and saying that it would be useless to wait for him for dinner, as he would not come home until late in the night, if he came home at all, being compelled to make up for his lost time.

“What is the matter with your father, my poor children?” exclaimed Madame Favoral. “I have never before seen him in such a state.”

“Doubtless,” replied Maxence, “the rupture with Costeclar will spoil some combination.”

But that explanation did not satisfy him any more than it did his mother. He, too, felt a vague apprehension of some impending misfortune. But what? He had nothing upon which to base his conjectures. He knew nothing, any more than his mother, of his father’s affairs, of his connections, of his interests, or even of his life, outside the house. And mother and son lost themselves in absurd suppositions. Mademoiselle Gilberte, however, thought she could have enlightened them. In the unerring certainty of the blow, in the crushing promptness of the result, she thought she recognised the hand of Marius de Trégars; the hand of the man who acts, and does not talk. And the girl’s pride felt flattered by this victory, by this proof of the powerful energy of the man whom, unknown to all, she had selected. She liked to imagine Marius de Trégars and M. Costeclar in presence of each other, the one as imperious and haughty as she had seen him meek and

trembling; the other more humble still than he was arrogant with her. "One thing is certain," she repeated to herself, "and that is, I am saved." And she wished the morrow to come, that she might announce her happiness to the very involuntary and very unconscious accomplice of Marius, the worthy *maestro* Gismondo Pulci.

The next day M. Favoral seemed to have resigned himself to the failure of his projects; and, the following Saturday, he told as a pleasant joke, how Mademoiselle Gilberte had carried the day, and had managed to dismiss her lover. But a close observer could discover in him symptoms of devouring cares. Deep wrinkles appeared across his forehead; his eyes were sunken; a continued tension of mind contracted his features. Often during dinner he would remain motionless for several minutes, his fork in the air; and then he would murmur, "How will it all end?" Sometimes in the morning, before his departure for his office, M. Jottras, and M. Saint-Pavin, the editor of "The Financial Pilot," came to see him. They closeted themselves together, and remained for hours in conference, speaking so low, that not even a vague murmur could be heard outside the door. "Your father has grave causes of anxiety, my children," said Madame Favoral: "you may believe me, who for twenty years have been trying to guess our fate upon his countenance." But the political events were sufficient to explain any amount of anxiety. It was the second week of July, 1870; and the destinies of France trembled, as upon a cast of the dice, in the hands of a few presumptuous and incapable persons. Was it war with Prussia, or was it peace, that was to issue from the complications of a childishly astute policy? The most contradictory rumours daily caused on the Bourse violent oscillations, which endangered the safest fortunes. A few words uttered in a corridor by Emile Ollivier had made a dozen heavy operators rich, but had ruined five hundred small ones. On all hands, credit was trembling. At last one evening when M. Favoral came home, he announced the declaration of war.

It was but too true; and no one then had any fears of the result for France. The French army had been so much exalted, it had so often been described as invincible, that every one among the public expected a series of crushing victories. Alas! the first telegram announced a defeat. People refused to believe it at first. But there was the evidence. The soldiers had died bravely; but the chiefs had been incapable of leading them. From that time, and with a vertiginous rapidity, from day to day, from hour to hour, the fatal news came crowding on. Like a river that overflows its banks, Prussia was overrunning France. Bazaine was surrounded at Metz; and the capitulation of Sedan capped the climax of so many disasters. At last, on the 4th of September, the Republic was proclaimed. On the 5th, when Signor Gismondo Pulci presented himself at the Rue St. Gilles, his face bore such an expression of anguish, that Gilberte could not help asking what was the matter. He rose from his seat, and, threatening heaven with his clinched fist, "Implacable fate does not tire of persecuting me," he replied. "I had overcome all obstacles, I was happy, I was looking forward to a future of fortune and glory. And now this dreadful war must break out." For the worthy *maestro*, this terrible catastrophe was but a new caprice of his own destiny.

"What has happened to you?" inquired the young girl, repressing a smile.

"It is, signorina, that I am about to lose my beloved pupil. He leaves me; he forsakes me. In vain have I thrown myself at his feet. My tears

have not been able to detain him. He is going to fight ; he leaves ; he is a soldier !”

Then it was given to Gilberte to see clearly within her soul. Then she understood how absolutely she had given herself up, and to what extent she had ceased to belong to herself. Her sensation was terrible, as though her whole blood had suddenly escaped through her open arteries. She turned pale, her teeth chattered ; and she seemed so near fainting, that Signor Gismondo sprang to the door, crying, “ Help, help ! she is dying.”

Madame Favoral, frightened, came running in. But already, thanks to an all-powerful strength of will, Gilberte had recovered, and, smiling a pale smile, “ It’s nothing, mamma,” she said. “ A sudden pain at my heart ; but it’s gone already.”

The worthy maestro was in perfect agony. Taking Madame Favoral aside, he said—“ It is my fault. It is the story of my unheard-of misfortunes that has upset her thus. Monstrous egotist that I am ! I should have been more careful of her exquisite sensibility.”

She insisted, nevertheless, upon taking her lesson as usual, and recovered enough presence of mind to extract from Signor Gismondo everything that his much-regretted pupil had confided to him. That was not much. He knew that his pupil had gone, like many others, to the Rue du Cherche-Midi ; that he had signed an engagement, and had been ordered to join a regiment in process of formation near Tours. And, as he went out, “ She is all right now,” said the kind maestro to Madame Favoral. “ The signorina has quite recovered, and is as gay as a lark.”

The signorina, shut up in her room, was shedding bitter tears. She tried to reason with herself, and could not succeed. Never had the strangeness of her situation so clearly appeared to her. She repeated to herself that she must be mad to have thus become attached to a stranger. She wondered how she could have allowed that love, which was now her very life, to take possession of her soul. But to what end ? It no longer rested with her to undo what had been done. When she thought that Marius de Trégars was about to leave Paris to become a soldier, to fight, to die perhaps, she felt her head whirl ; she saw nothing around her but despair and chaos. But, the more she thought, the more certain she felt that Marius could not have trusted solely to the chance gossip of Signor Pulci to communicate to her his determination. “ It is perfectly inadmissible,” she thought. “ It is impossible that he will not make an effort to see me before leaving.”

Thoroughly imbued with this idea, she wiped her eyes, took a seat by an open window ; and, whilst apparently busy with her work, she concentrated her whole attention upon the street. There were more people out than usual. The recent events had stirred Paris to its lowest depths, and, as from the crater of a volcano in labour, all the social scum rose to the surface. Men of sinister appearance left their haunts, and wandered through the city. The workshops were all deserted ; and people strolled at random, stupor or terror impressed on their countenances. But in vain did Mademoiselle Gilberte seek in all this crowd the one she hoped to see. The hours went by, and she was getting discouraged, when suddenly, towards dusk, at the corner of the Rue de Turenne, a voice within her cried : “ ’Tis he.” It was, in fact, M. de Trégars. He was walking towards the Boulevard Beaumarchais slowly, and with his eyes raised. Palpitating, the young girl rose to her feet. She was in one of those moments of crisis when the blood, rushing to the brain, smothered all judgment. Uncon-

scious, as it were, of her acts, she leaned out of the window, and made a sign to Marius, which he understood very well, and which meant: "Wait, I am coming down."

"Where are you going, dear?" asked Madame Favoral, seeing Gilberte put on her bonnet.

"To the draper's, mamma, to get a shade of worsted I need."

Mademoiselle Gilberte was not in the habit of going out alone; but it happened quite often that she would go out in the neighbourhood on some little errand.

"Do you wish the girl to go out with you?" asked Madame Favoral.

"Oh, it isn't worth while!"

She ran down the stairs and once out, regardless of the eyes that might be watching her, she walked straight to M. de Trégars, who was waiting at the corner of the Rue des Minimes. "You are going away?" she said, too much agitated to notice his own emotion, which was, however, quite evident.

"I must," he answered.

"Oh!"

"When France is invaded, the place of a man who bears my name is where the fighting is."

"But there will be fighting at Paris too."

"Paris has four times as many defenders as it needs. It is outside that soldiers will be wanted."

"They walked slowly, as they spoke thus, along the Rue des Minimes, one of the least frequented in Paris; and at that hour there were only to be seen five or six soldiers lounging in front of the barracks' gate.

"Suppose, however, I were to beg you not to go," resumed Mademoiselle Gilberte. "Suppose I beseeched you, Marius!"

"I should remain then," he answered in a troubled voice; "but I would be betraying my duty, and wanting in honour; and remorse would weigh upon us for the rest of our lives. Now command, and I will obey."

After a moment of painful reflection, the young girl said: "I no longer ask you to stay, Marius."

He took her hand, and raised it to his lips. "I expected no less of your courage," he exclaimed, his voice vibrating with love. But he controlled himself, and, in a more quiet tone, he added: "Thanks to Pulci's indiscretion, I was in hopes of seeing you, but not of having the happiness of speaking to you. I had written to you"—He drew from his pocket a large envelope, and, handing it to Mademoiselle Gilberte,—"Here is the letter," he continued, "which I intended for you. It contains another, which I beg you to preserve carefully, and not to open unless I do not return. I leave behind me in Paris a devoted friend, the Count de Villegré. Whatever may happen to you, apply to him with all confidence, as you would to myself."

Mademoiselle Gilberte, staggering, leaned against the wall. "When do you leave?" she inquired.

"This very night. Communications may be cut off at any moment."

Admirable in her sorrow, but also full of energy, the poor girl looked up, and held out her hand to him. "Go then," said she, "O my only friend! go, since honour commands. But do not forget that it is not your life alone that you are going to risk."

And, fearing to burst into sobs, she fled, and reached the Rue St. Gilles a few moments before her father, who had gone out in quest of news. What

he heard was far from reassuring. Like the rising tide, the Prussians spread and advanced, slowly but steadily. Their marches were numbered; and the day and hour could be named when their flood would come and strike the walls of Paris. There was, therefore, at all the railway stations, a prodigious rush of people who wished to leave at any cost, in any way, in the luggage-van if needs be, and who certainly were not, like Marius, rushing to meet the enemy. One after another, M. Favoral had seen nearly every one he knew take flight. Baron and Baroness de Thaller and their daughter had gone to Switzerland; M. Costeclar was travelling in Belgium; the elder Jottras was in England, buying guns and cartridges; and if the younger Jottras remained in Paris with M. Saint-Pavin of "The Financial Pilot," it was because they had obtained some valuable contracts from the government, through the gallant influence of a lady whose name was not mentioned.

The cashier's perplexities were great. The day that the Baron and the Baroness de Thaller had left, he said to his wife: "Pack up our trunks at once. The Bourse will soon close; and the Mutual Credit Bank can very well do without me."

But the next day he became undecided again. What Gilberte thought was that he was longing to go off alone, and leave his family, but that he dared not do it. He hesitated so long, that at last, one evening, he exclaimed: "You may unpack the trunks. Paris is invested; and no one can leave now."

XVIII.

In fact, the news had just been received, that the Western Railway, the last one that had remained open, was now closed. Paris was invested; and so rapid had been the investment, that it could hardly be believed. People flocked in crowds to the highest parts of Paris, like the Buttes Montmartre, and the heights of the Trocadéro. Telescopes were set up, and every one was anxious to scan the horizon, and look for the Prussians. But nothing could be discovered. The distant fields retained their quiet and smiling aspect under the mild rays of the autumn sun. So that it really required quite an effort of imagination to realise the sinister fact, to understand that Paris, with its two millions of inhabitants, was indeed cut off from the world and separated from the rest of France, by an insurmountable circle of steel. Doubt and something like a vague hope could be traced in the tones of those who, meeting acquaintances in the streets, would say: "Well, it's all over; we can't leave now. Letters even, cannot pass. No more news, eh?" But the next day, which was the 19th of September, the most incredulous were convinced. For the first time Paris trembled at the hoarse voice of the cannon thundering on the heights of Châtillon. The siege of Paris had commenced.

The life the Favorals led during those interminable days of anguish and suffering, was similar to that of a hundred thousand other families. Incorporated in the battalion of national guards of his ward, the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank, went off two or three times a week, the same as all his neighbours, to mount guard on the ramparts,—a useless duty perhaps, though those that performed it, did not think so,—a very arduous duty, at any rate, for well-to-do citizens, accustomed to the comforts of their shops, or of their offices. To be sure, there was nothing heroic in tramping

through the mud, in being soaked through by the rain or snow, in sleeping on the ground or on dirty straw, in mounting guard during the most severe frosts. But one may die of pleurisy just as much as by a Prussian bullet ; and many died of it. Maxence showed himself but rarely at the Rue St. Gilles : he had enlisted in a battalion of freeshooters, and did duty at the outposts. As to Madame Favoral and Mademoiselle Gilberte, they spent their days in obtaining food. Rising before daylight in spite of rain or snow, they joined the crowd stationed at the door of the butcher's shop, and, after waiting hours for their turn, received a small slice of horse flesh. Alone together in the evening, by the side of the hearth where a few pieces of green wood smoked without burning, they started at each of the distant reports of the cannon. Madame Favoral thought that it was, perhaps, the one that had killed her son. And Mademoiselle Gilberte was thinking of Marius de Trégars. The accursed days of November and December had come. There were constant rumours of bloody battles fought around Orleans. She imagined Marius, mortally wounded, expiring on the snow, alone, and without a friend to help him. One evening the vision was so clear, and the impression so strong, that she started up and uttered a loud cry.

"What is it?" asked Madame Favoral, alarmed. "What is the matter?"

With a little perspicacity, the worthy woman could easily have discovered her daughter's secret ; for Gilberte was not in condition to deny anything. But she contented herself with an explanation which meant nothing, and did not entertain the slightest suspicion, when the young girl answered, with a forced smile : "It's nothing, dear mother, nothing but an absurd idea that crossed my mind."

Strange to say, the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank had never before been so pleasant with his family as he was during those months of trial. During the first weeks of the siege he had been anxious, agitated, nervous ; he wandered through the house like a soul in trouble ; he had moments of inconceivable prostration, during which tears could be seen coursing down his cheeks ; and then fits of anger without motive. But every day that elapsed seemed to bring calm to his soul. Little by little, he became so indulgent and so affectionate to his wife, that the poor helot felt her heart touched. He was so attentive to his daughter that she knew not what to think. Often, when the weather was fine, he took them out walking, along the quays towards a part of the ramparts occupied by the battalion of their ward. Twice he took them to St. Ouen, where the party of freeshooters to which Maxence belonged were encamped. Another day he wished to take them to visit M. de Thaller's house, of which he had charge. They refused, and instead of getting angry, as he certainly would have done formerly, he commenced describing to them the splendours of the apartments, the magnificent furniture, the carpets and the hangings, the valuable paintings, the objects of art, the bronzes, in a word, all that dazzling luxury of which financiers make use, after the fashion of those bird-catchers who snare skylarks by the aid of looking-glasses. He never in any way alluded to business. He went every morning to the Mutual Credit Bank ; but, as he said, it was solely as a matter of form. Now and then M. Saint-Pavin and the younger Jottras called at the Rue St. Gillies. They had suspended—the one the payments of his banking house ; the other, the publication of "The Financial Pilot." But they were not idle for all that : and, in the midst of the public distress, they still managed to speculate upon something, no one knew what, and to realise profits. They pleasantly rallied

the fools who had faith in the defence, and imitated in the most laughable manner the appearance, in their soldiers' cloaks, of three or four of their friends who had joined the fighting battalions. They boasted that they endured no privations, and always knew where to obtain sufficient fresh butter to dress the large slices of beef which they possessed the art of finding. Madame Favoral sometimes heard them laugh; and M. Saint-Pavin, the editor of "The Financial Pilot," would exclaim: "Come, come! we would be fools to complain. It is a general liquidation, without risks and without costs."

Their mirth had something revolting in it; for it was then the last and most acute period of the siege. At the beginning, the greatest optimists hardly thought that Paris could hold out six weeks. And now the siege had lasted over four months. The population was reduced to nameless articles of food. The supply of bread had failed; the wounded, for lack of a little soup, died in the ambulances; old people and children perished by the hundred; on the left bank of the Seine the shells came down thick and fast; the weather was intensely cold, and there was no more fuel. And yet no one complained. From the midst of that population of two millions of inhabitants, not one voice rose to beg for their comfort, their health, their life even, at the cost of a capitulation. Clear-sighted men had never hoped that Paris alone could compel the enemy to raise the siege; but they thought, that by holding out, and keeping the Prussians under its walls, Paris would procure France sufficient time to rise up, to organise armies, and to exterminate the enemy. That was the duty of Paris; and Paris was toiling to fulfil it to the utmost limits of possibility, reckoning as a victory each day that it held out. Unfortunately, all this suffering was to be in vain. The fatal hour struck, when, supplies being entirely exhausted, it became necessary to surrender. During three days the Prussians camped in the Champs Elysées, gazing with longing eyes upon that city, the object of their most eager desires,—that Paris about which, victorious though they were, they did not dare to venture. Then, soon after, communications were re-opened; and one morning, on receiving a letter from Switzerland, M. Favoral exclaimed: "It is from the Baron de Thaller!"

And it was so. The manager of the Mutual Credit Bank was a prudent man. Pleasantly installed in Switzerland, he was not at all anxious to return to Paris before being quite certain that he would run no risks. Upon receiving M. Favoral's assurance to that effect, he started; and, almost at the same time the elder Jottras and M. Costeclar reappeared.

XIX.

It was a curious spectacle, the return of those braves for whom Parisian slang had invented the new and significant expression of *franc-fleur*. They were not so proud then as they have been since. Feeling rather embarrassed in the midst of a population still quivering with the emotions of the siege, they had at least the good taste to try and find pretexts for their absence. "I was shut out," affirmed the Baron de Thaller. "I had gone to Switzerland to place my wife and daughter in safety. When I came back, good-bye! the Prussians had closed the doors. For more than a week I wandered around Paris, trying to find an opening. I became suspected of being a spy. I was arrested, and almost shot?" "As to myself," declared M. Costeclar, "I foresaw exactly what has happened. I knew that men would be wanted outside, to organise armies of relief. I went and offered my services to the

government of National Defence; and everybody in Bordeaux saw me booted and spurred, and ready to leave." He was consequently soliciting the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and was not without hopes of obtaining it through the all-powerful influence of his financial connections. "Didn't So-and-so get it?" he replied to objections. And he named this or that individual whose feats of arms consisted principally in having exhibited themselves in uniforms covered with stripes to the very shoulders. "But I am the man who deserves it most, that cross," insisted the younger M. Jottras; "for I, at least, have rendered valuable services." And he went on telling how, after searching for arms all over England, he had sailed for New York, where he had purchased any number of guns and cartridges, and even cannons. This last journey had been very wearisome to him, he added, and yet he did not regret it; for it had furnished him an opportunity to study on the spot the financial customs of America; and he had returned with enough schemes to make the fortunes of three or four stock companies with twenty millions of capital. "Ah, those Americans!" he exclaimed. "They are the men who understand business! We are but children when compared to them."

It was through M. Chapelain, the Desclavettes, and old Desormeaux, that the Favorals obtained their news. And also through Maxence, whose battalion had been disbanded, and who, whilst waiting for something better, had accepted a clerkship in the offices, of the Orleans Railway, by which he earned two hundred francs a month. For M. Favoral saw and heard nothing that was going on around him. He was wholly absorbed in his business: he left earlier, came home later, and hardly allowed himself time to eat and drink. He told all his friends that business was looking up again in the most unexpected manner; that fortunes were to be made by those who could command ready cash; and that it was well to make up for lost time. He pretended that the enormous indemnity to be paid to the Prussians would necessitate an enormous movement of capital, financial combinations, a loan, and that so many milliards could not be handled without a few little millions falling into intelligent pockets. Dazzled by the mere enumeration of these fabulous sums, his friends would say: "I should not be a bit surprised to see Favoral double and perhaps treble his fortune. What a famous match his daughter will be!"

Alas! never had Mademoiselle Gilberte felt in her heart so much hatred and disgust for money, the only thought, the sole subject of conversation, of those around her; that cursed money which had risen like an insurmountable barrier between Marius and herself. For two weeks past, communication with the provinces had been completely restored; and yet there had been no sign of M. de Trégars. Her heart beat violently each time the hour approached at which Signor Gismondo Pulci gave her her lesson; and her anguish became more painful each time she heard him exclaim: "Nothing, not a line, not a word. The pupil has forgotten his old master!" But Gilberte knew well that Marius had not forgotten. Her blood froze in her veins when she read in the papers the interminable list of those poor soldiers who had succumbed during the invasion: the more fortunate ones under the Prussian bullets; the others along the roads, in the mud or in the snow, of cold, of fatigue, of suffering and of want. She could not drive from her mind the memory of that lugubrious vision which had so much frightened her; and she asked herself whether it was not one of those inexplicable presentiments, which announce the death of a beloved person. Alone at night, in her little room, Gilberte withdrew from the hiding place,

where she preciousely kept it, the letter which Marius had confided to her, enjoining her not to open it until she was sure that he would not return. It was very voluminous, enclosed in an envelope of thick paper, sealed with red wax, bearing the arms of the Trégars; and she had often wondered what it could possibly contain. And now she shuddered at the thought that she had perhaps the right to open it.

There was no one of whom she could ask a word of hope. She was compelled to hide her tears, and try to smile. She was compelled to invent pretexts for those who expressed their wonder at seeing her exquisite beauty withering in the bud; for her mother, whose anxiety was without limit at seeing her thus, pale, her eyes inflamed, and her system undermined by a continuous fever. True, Marius, on leaving, had left her a friend, the Count de Villegré; and, if any one knew anything, he certainly did. But she could see no way of hearing from him without risking her secret. To write to him was easy enough since she had his address. But where could she ask him to direct his answer? Certainly not to the Rue St. Gilles. True, she might go to him, or meet him somewhere in the neighbourhood. But how could she go out, even for an hour, without exciting Madame Favoral's suspicions? Sometimes it occurred to her to confide in Maxence, who was labouring with admirable constancy to redeem his past. But then she would have to confess the truth,—confess that she, Gilberte, had listened to the words of a stranger, met by chance in the street, and that she looked forward to no happiness in life save through him? She dared not. She could not face the shame of such a position.

She was on the verge of despair, when Signor Pulci arrived radiant, exclaiming from the very threshold, "I have news!" And at once, without the least surprise at the awful emotion of the girl, which he attributed solely to the interest she felt for him, he continued: "I did not get it direct, but through a respectable signor with long moustaches and a red ribbon at his button-hole, who, having received a letter from my dear pupil, deigned to come to my room, and read it to me."

The worthy maestro had not forgotten a single word of that letter; and he repeated it almost literally. Six weeks after enlisting, his pupil had been promoted corporal, then sergeant, then lieutenant. He had taken part in all the battles of the army of the Loire without receiving a scratch. But at the battle of Le Mans, whilst leading back his men, who were giving way, he received two bullets in the breast. Carried almost dying to the ambulance, he had lingered three weeks between life and death, having lost all consciousness. Twenty-four hours ago, he had recovered his senses; and he took the first opportunity to recall himself to the affection of his friends. All danger was over, he scarcely suffered at all; and the surgeon had told him, that, within a month, he would be up, and able to return to Paris. For the first time during many weeks, Gilberte breathed freely. But she would have been greatly surprised, had she been told that a day was drawing near when she would bless those wounds which detained Marius in the hospital. And yet it was so.

Madame Favoral and her daughter were alone, one evening, when loud clamours arose from the street. In the midst of the noise could be heard drunken voices yelling the refrains of revolutionary songs, accompanied by continuous rumbling sounds. The two women ran to the window. The National Guards had just taken possession of the cannons parked in the Place Royale. The reign of the Commune had commenced. In less than forty-eight hours, people came to regret the worst days of the siege. With-

out commanders to direct them, the honest men lost their heads. All the braves who had returned at the time of the armistice had again taken flight. Soon people had to hide or to fly to avoid being incorporated in the battalions of the Commune. Night and day, around the walls of the city, the musketry rattled, and the artillery thundered. Again M. Favoral gave up going to his office. Where was the use? Sometimes, with a singular look, he would say to his wife and children: "This time it is indeed a liquidation. Paris is lost!" And they must have thought so, when at the hour of the supreme struggle, among the detonations of the artillery and the explosion of the shells, they felt their house shaking to its very foundations; when in the midst of the night they saw their apartment as brilliantly lighted as at mid-day by the flames which were consuming the Hôtel de Ville and the houses around the Place de la Bastille. And, in fact, the rapid action of the troops alone saved Paris from destruction.

XX.

TOWARDS the end of the following week, matters commenced to quiet down; and Gilberte learned that Marius had returned.

"At last my eyes have contemplated him, and my arms have again pressed him to my heart!" It was in these terms that the old Italian, all vibrating with enthusiasm, and with his most terrible accent, announced to Mademoiselle Gilberte that he had just seen that famous pupil from whom he expected both glory and fortune. "But how weak he is still!" he added, "and how he suffers from his wounds. I hardly recognised him, he has grown so pale and so thin."

The young girl however was no longer listening to him. A flood of life filled her heart. This moment made her forget all her troubles and all her anguish. "And I too," thought she, "will see him again to-day." And, with the unerring instinct of the woman who loves, she calculated the moment when Marius would appear in the Rue St. Gilles. It would probably be about nightfall, like the other time, when he was going away; towards eight o'clock, for the days just then were about the longest in the year. Now it so happened, that, on that very evening, Mademoiselle Gilberte expected to be alone at home. It had been arranged that after dinner her mother would call on Madame Desclavettes, who was in bed, half dead of the fright she had had during the last moments of the Commune. She would therefore be free, and would not have to invent some pretext to go out for a few moments. She could not help, however, but feel that this was a bold and most venturesome step for her to take; and, when her mother went out, she had not yet fully decided what to do. But her bonnet was within reach, and Marius's letter was in her pocket. She went and sat at the window. The street was solitary and silent as usual at that hour. Night was coming; and heavy black clouds floated over Paris. The heat was overpowering: there was not a breath of air. One by one, as the hour when she expected to see Marius approached, the young girl's hesitations vanished like smoke. She feared but one thing,—that he would not come, or that he might already have come and left, without succeeding in seeing her.

Already did the objects in the street become less distinct; and the gas was being lit in the backshops, when she recognised him on the other side of the way. He looked up as he went by; and, without stopping he made

a rapid gesture, which she alone could understand, and, which meant, "Come, I beseech you!" Her heart beating loud enough to be heard, Gilberte ran down stairs. But it was only when she found herself in the street that she could appreciate the magnitude of the risk she was running. Concierges and shopkeepers were all sitting in front of their doors, enjoying the fresh air. All knew her. Would they not be surprised at seeing her out alone at such an hour? She could see Marius a short distance in front. But he had understood the danger; and, instead of turning the corner of the Rue des Minimes, he followed the Rue St. Gilles, and only stopped on the other side of the Boulevard Beaumarchais. Then only did Gilberte join him; and she could not withhold an exclamation, when she saw that he was as pale as a corpse, and scarcely able to stand up and walk.

"How imprudent of you to return so soon!" she said.

A slight flush came to M. de Trégars's cheeks. His face brightened up, and, in a voice quivering with suppressed passion, he murmured: "It would have been more imprudent still to stay away. Far from you, I felt myself dying."

They were both leaning against the shutters of a shop; and they were as though alone in the midst of the throng that circulated on the Boulevards, busy looking at the fearful wrecks of the Commune. "And besides," continued Marius, "have I, then, a minute to lose? I asked you for three years. Fifteen months have gone by, and I am no better off than on the first day. When this accursed war broke out, all my arrangements were made. I was certain to accumulate rapidly a sufficient fortune to enable me to ask for your hand without the prospect of being refused. Whereas now—"

"Well?"

"Now everything is changed. The future is so uncertain, that no one is willing to venture his capital. Marcolet himself, who certainly does not lack boldness, and who believes firmly in the success of our enterprise, was saying only yesterday, 'There is nothing to be done just now: we must wait.'"

His voice displayed such an intensity of grief, that the young girl felt the tears coming to her eyes. "We will wait then," she said, attempting to smile.

But M. de Trégars shook his head. "Is it possible?" he said. "Do you then think that I do not know what a life you lead?"

Mademoiselle Gilberte looked up. "Have I ever complained?" she asked proudly.

"No. Your mother and yourself, you have always religiously kept the secret of your sufferings; and it was only a providential accident that revealed them to me. But I have learnt everything at last. I know that she whom I love exclusively and with all the power of my soul is subjected to the most odious despotism, insulted, and condemned to the most humiliating privations. And I, who would give my life for her a thousand times over, I can do nothing for her. Money raises between us such an insuperable obstacle, that my love is actually an offence. To hear from her, I am driven to make use of accomplices. If I obtain from her a few moments conversation, I run the risk of compromising her reputation."

Deeply affected by his emotion, Gilberte said: "At least, you succeeded in delivering me from M. Costeclar."

"Yes, I was fortunately able to find weapons against that scoundrel. But shall I find some against all others who may present themselves? Your

father is very rich ; and there are plenty of men for whom marriage is but a speculation like any other."

"Do you doubt me?"

"Ah, rather would I doubt myself ! But I know what cruel trials your refusal to marry M. Costeclar imposed upon you ; I know what a merciless struggle you had to sustain. Another pretender may come, and then—No, no, you see that we cannot wait !"

"What would you do?"

"I know not. I have not yet decided upon my future course. And yet heaven knows what have been the labours of my mind during the long months I have just spent upon an ambulance bed,—that month during which you were my only thought. Ah ! when I think of it, I cannot find words to curse the recklessness with which I gave up my fortune."

The young girl drew back a step, as if she had heard blasphemy. "It is impossible," she exclaimed, "that you can regret having paid what your father owed."

A bitter smile contracted M. de Trégars's lips. "And suppose I were to tell you," he replied, "that my father in reality owed nothing."

"Oh !"

"Suppose I told you they took from him his entire fortune, over two millions, as audaciously as a pickpocket robs a man of his handkerchief ? Suppose I told you, that, in his loyal simplicity, he was but a man of straw in the hands of skilful knaves ? Have you forgotten what Count de Villegré said ?"

Gilberte had forgotten nothing. "Count de Villegré," she replied, "pretended that there was still time enough to compel the men who had robbed your father to disgorge."

"Exactly !" exclaimed Marius. "And now I am determined to make them do so."

"During this conversation night had come. Lights appeared in the shop-windows ; and the gas lamps were being lit along the Boulevard. Alarmed by this sudden illumination, M. de Trégars led Gilberte to a more obscure spot, close to the steps that descend to the Rue Amelot ; and then, leaning against the iron railing, he continued : "Already, at the time of my father's death, I suspected the abominable tricks of which he was the victim. I thought it unworthy of me to verify my suspicions. I was alone in the world : my wants were few. I was fully convinced that my researches would give me, within a brief time, a much larger fortune than the one I gave up. I found something noble and grand, and which flattered my vanity, in thus abandoning everything, without discussion, without litigation, and in consummating my ruin with a dash of my pen. Among my friends Count de Villegré alone had the courage to tell me that this was a guilty piece of folly ; that the silence of the dupes is the strength of the knaves ; that my disdain, which made the rascals rich, would make them laugh too. I replied that I did not wish to see the name of Trégars dragged into court in a scandalous law-suit, and that to preserve a dignified silence was to honour my father's memory. Treble fool that I was ! The only way to honour my father's memory was to avenge him, to wrest his spoils from the scoundrels who had caused his death. I see it clearly to-day. But before undertaking anything, Gilberte, I wished to consult you."

The young girl was listening with the most intense attention. She had come to mingle her future life and that of M. de Trégars so completely in her thoughts, that she saw nothing unusual in the fact of his consulting her

upon matters affecting their prospects, and of seeing herself standing there deliberating with him. "You will require proofs," she suggested.

"I have none, unfortunately," replied M. de Trégars; "at least, none sufficiently positive, and such as are required by courts of law. But I think I can obtain them. My former suspicions have become a certainty. The same good luck that enabled me to deliver you of M. Costeclar's persecutions, also placed the most valuable information in my hands."

"Then you must act," said Gilberte resolutely.

Marius hesitated for a moment, as if seeking words to convey what he still had to say. At length he resumed: "It is my duty to conceal nothing from you. My task is a heavy one. The obscure schemers of ten years ago have become big financiers, intrenched behind their money-bags as behind an impregnable fort. Formerly isolated, they have managed to gather around them powerful interests, accomplices high in office, and friends whose commanding situation protects them. Having succeeded, they are absolved. They have in their favour what is called public consideration, that idiotic thing which is made up of the admiration of fools, the approbation of knaves, and the concert of all interested vanities. When they pass by, their horses at full trot, their carriages raising a cloud of dust, insolent, impudent, swelled with the vulgar fatuity of wealth, people bow to the ground, and say, 'Those are smart fellows!' And in fact, yes; through skill or luck, they have hitherto avoided the police-courts where so many others have come to grief. Those who despise them fear them, and shake hands with them. Moreover, they are rich enough not to steal any more themselves. They employ others to do that. I take Heaven to witness that never until lately had the idea come to me to disturb in their possession the men who robbed my father. Alone, what need had I of money? Later on, my friend! I thought I could succeed in amassing the fortune I needed to obtain your hand. You had promised to wait; and I was happy to think that I should owe you to my sole exertions. Events have crushed my hopes. I am to-day compelled to acknowledge that all my efforts would be in vain. To wait would be to run the risk of losing you. Therefore I hesitate no longer. I want what's mine; I wish to recover that of which I have been robbed. Whatever I may do,—for, alas! I know not to what I may be driven, what part I may have to play,—remember that of all my acts, of all my thoughts, there will not be a single one that does not aim to bring nearer the blessed day when you shall become my wife."

There was in his voice so much unspeakable affection, that the young girl could hardly restrain her tears. "Never, Marius, whatever may happen, shall I doubt you," she exclaimed.

He took her hands, and, pressing them passionately within his, he cried: "And I swear, that, sustained by the thought of you, there is no disgust that I will not overcome, no obstacle that I will not overthrow." He spoke so loud, that two or three persons stopped. He noticed it, and was brought suddenly from sentiment to reality. "Unhappy lovers that we are," he said in a low, quick voice, "we forget what this interview may cost us!"

He hastily led Gilberte across the Boulevard; and, whilst making their way to the Rue St. Gilles, through the more deserted streets, he resumed: "We have been very imprudent, but it was indispensable that we should see each other; and we had not the choice of means. Now, and for a long time, we shall be separated. Everything you wish me to know concerning yourself, tell to that worthy Gismondo, who repeats faithfully to me every

word you utter. Through him, also, you shall hear from me. Twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, about dusk, I will pass by your house; and, if I am lucky enough to have a glimpse of you, I shall return home fired with fresh energy. Should anything extraordinary have happened, beckon to me, and I will wait for you in the Rue des Minimes. But this is an expedient which we must only use with great circumspection. I should never forgive myself, were I to compromise your fair name."

They approached the Rue St. Gilles. Marius stopped. "We must part," he murmured.

But only then did Gilberte remember M. de Trégars's letter, to return which was her excuse for meeting him. She took it from her pocket, and handing it to him, she said: "Here is the package you left with me."

"No," he answered, repelling her gently, "keep that letter: it must never be opened now, except by the Marchioness de Trégars." And raising her hand to his lips, he added, in a deeply agitated voice: "Farewell! Have courage, and have hope."

XXI.

GILBERTE was soon far away; yet Marius de Trégars remained motionless at the corner of the street, following her with his eyes through the dim twilight. She walked quickly, stumbling along the badly-paved side-walk. Away from Marius, her mind as it were returned to earth from the world of dreams. The deceiving illusion had vanished, and, once again in the world of sad reality, she became seized with anxiety. How long had she been away from home! She knew not, and was unable to find out. But it was evidently late; for many of the shops were shut. At length she reached the house. Stepping back, and looking at the windows, she saw that the drawing-room was lit up. "Mother has returned," she thought, trembling with apprehension. She hurried upstairs, nevertheless; and, just as she reached the landing, Madame Favoral opened the door, preparing to go down.

"At last you are restored to me!" exclaimed the poor mother, whose sinister apprehensions were revealed by that single exclamation. "I was going out to look for you at random, in the streets, anywhere." And, drawing her daughter inside, she clasped her in her arms with convulsive tenderness, exclaiming: "Where were you? Where do you come from? Do you know that it is long past nine o'clock?"

Such had been Gilberte's state of mind during the whole of that evening, that she had not even thought of finding some reason for her absence, Now it was too late. Besides, what explanation would have been plausible? Therefore, instead of giving a direct answer, she said, with a forced smile: "Why, dear mother, has it not often happened that I have gone out like this?"

But Madame Favoral's confiding credulity was gone for ever. "I have been blind, Gilberte," she interrupted; "but this time my eyes open to evidence. There is a mystery in your life, something extraordinary, which I dare not try to guess."

Mademoiselle Gilberte drew herself up, and, looking her mother straight in the face, with her beautiful, clear glance, she exclaimed: "Do you suspect me of doing something wrong, then?"

Madame Favoral stopped her with a gesture. "A young girl who con

ceals anything from her mother always does wrong," she replied. "It is a long while since I first had a presentiment that you were hiding something from me. But, when I questioned you, you succeeded in quieting my suspicions. You abused both my confidence and my weakness."

This was the cruelest reproach that could be addressed to Mademoiselle Gilberte. The blood rushed to her face, and, in a firm voice, she said: "Well, yes, I have a secret!"

"My child!"

"And, if I have not confided in you, it is because it is also the secret of another. Yes, I confess, I have been imprudent in the extreme; I have stepped beyond all the limits of propriety and social custom; I have exposed myself to the worst calumnies. But I assure you, I have never done anything with which my conscience can reproach me, anything that I may have to blush for, anything that I regret, anything that I am not ready to do again to-morrow."

"Gilberte!"

"I said nothing, 'tis true; but it was my duty. Alone I had to suffer the responsibility of my acts. Having alone freely engaged my future, I wished to bear alone the weight of my anxiety. I should never have forgiven myself for having added this new care to all your other troubles."

Madame Favoral stood dismayed. Big tears rolled down her withered cheeks. "Don't you see, then," she stammered, "that all my past suffering is as nothing compared to what I endure to-day? Good heavens! what have I ever done to deserve so many trials? Am I to be spared none of the troubles of this world? And it is through my own daughter that I am the most cruelly stricken!"

This was more than Gilberte could bear. Her heart was breaking at the sight of her mother's emotion. Throwing her arms around her neck, she murmured, as she kissed away her tears: "Mother, darling mother, I beg of you do not weep thus! Speak to me! What do you wish me to do?"

The poor woman disengaged herself. "Tell me the truth," she answered.

Was it not certain that this was the very thing she would ask; in fact, the only thing she could ask? Ah! how much would the young girl have preferred one of her father's violent scenes and his brutality which would have exalted her energy, instead of crushing it! Attempting to gain time, she said: "Well, yes, I'll tell you everything, mother, but not now, to-morrow, later." She was about to yield, however, when her father's arrival put an end to their conversation.

The cashier was quite lively that night. He was humming a tune, a thing which did not happen to him four times a-year, and which was indicative of the most extreme satisfaction. But he suddenly stopped at the sight of the disturbed looks of his wife and daughter. "What is the matter?" he inquired.

"Nothing," hastily answered Mademoiselle Gilberte, "nothing at all, father."

"Then you are crying for your amusement," he said. "Come, be candid for once, and confess that Maxence has been at his tricks again!"

"You are mistaken, father, I assure you!"

He asked no further questions, being in his nature not very curious, either because home matters were of such little consequence to him, or because he had a vague idea that his general behaviour towards his family

deprived him of all right to their confidence. "Very well, then," he said in a gruff tone, "let us all go to bed. I have worked so hard to-day, that I am quite knocked up. People who pretend that business is dull make me laugh. Never has M. de Thaller been in the way of making so much money as now."

When he spoke, they obeyed. So that Mademoiselle Gilberte found she had the whole night before her to recover from her emotion, to pass over in her mind the events of the evening, and deliberate coolly upon the decision she must come to; for she could not doubt but that Madame Favoral would, the very next day, renew her questions. What should she say? Avow everything? Gilberte's heart prompted her to do so; as did also the certainty of indulgent complicity, and the thought of finding in a sympathetic soul the echo of her joys, of her troubles, and of her hopes. Yes. But Madame Favoral was still the same weak woman, whose firmest resolutions vanished beneath her husband's gaze. Let another pretender come; let another struggle begin, as with M. Costeclar,—would she have strength enough to remain silent? No! Then there would be a fearful scene with M. Favoral. He might, perhaps, even go to M. de Trégars. What a scandal! For he was a man who spared no one; and then a new obstacle would rise between them, more insurmountable still than the others. Mademoiselle Gilberte thought, too, of her lover's projects; of that terrible game he was about to play, the issue of which was to decide their fate. He had said enough to make her understand all its perils, and that a single indiscretion might suffice to set at nought the result of many months' labour and patience. Besides, to speak, was it not to abuse his confidence? How could she expect another to keep a secret she had been unable to keep herself?

At last, after protracted and painful hesitations, she decided that she was bound to silence, and that she would only vouchsafe the vaguest explanations. It was in vain, then, that, on the next and following days, Madame Favoral tried to obtain that confession which she had seen, as it were, rise to her daughter's lips. To her passionate adjurations, to her tears, to her ruses even, Gilberte invariably opposed equivocal answers, a story through which nothing could be guessed, save one of those childish romances which stop at the preface, a school-girl love for a chimerical hero. There was nothing in this very reassuring to a mother; and Madame Favoral knew her daughter too well to hope to conquer her invincible obstinacy. She insisted no more, appeared convinced, but resolved to exercise the utmost vigilance. In vain, however, did she display all the penetration of which she was capable. The severest attention did not reveal to her a single suspicious fact, not a circumstance from which she could draw an induction, until, at last, she thought that she must have been mistaken. The fact is, that Gilberte had not been long in noticing that she was watched; and she observed her own behaviour with a tenacious circumspection that could hardly have been expected of her resolute nature impatient of all control. She trained herself to a sort of cheerful carelessness, to which she strictly adhered, studying every expression of her countenance, and avoiding carefully those hours of vague reverie in which she formerly indulged. For two successive weeks, fearing to be betrayed by her looks, she had the courage not to show herself at the window at the hour when she knew Marius would pass. She was, however, very minutely informed of the different events of the campaign undertaken by M. de Trégars.

More enthusiastic than ever about his pupil, Signor Gismondo Pulci never tired of singing his praises, and with such pomp of expression, and so curious an exuberance of gesticulation, that Madame Favoral was much amused ; and, on the days when she was present at her daughter's lesson, she was the first to inquire, " Well, how is that famous pupil of yours ? "

And, according to what Marius had told him, the candid maestro answered : " He is swimming in the greatest satisfaction. Everything succeeds miraculously well, and much beyond his hopes." Or else, knitting his brows, he would say : " He was sad yesterday, owing to an unexpected disappointment ; but he does not lose courage. We shall succeed."

The young girl could not help smiling to see her mother thus assisting Signor Gismondo's unconscious complicity. Then she reproached herself for having smiled, and for having thus come, through a gradual and fatal descent, to laugh at a duplicity for which she would have blushed in former times. In spite of herself, however, she took a passionate interest in the game that was being played between her mother and herself, and of which her secret was the stake. It was an ever-palpitating interest in her hitherto monotonous life, and a source of constantly-renewed emotions. The days became weeks, and the weeks months ; and Madame Favoral relaxed her useless surveillance, and, little by little, gave it up almost entirely. She still thought, that, at a certain moment, something unusual had occurred to her daughter ; but she felt persuaded, that, whatever that was, it had been forgotten. So that, on the stated days, Gilberte could go and lean upon the window-sill, without fear of being called to account for the emotion which she felt when M. de Trégars appeared. At the expected hour, invariably, and with a punctuality to shame M. Favoral himself, he turned the corner of the Rue de Turenne, exchanged a rapid glance with the young girl, and passed on. His health was completely restored : and with it he had recovered that graceful virility which results from the perfect blending of suppleness and strength. But he no longer wore the plain garments of former days. He was dressed now with that elegant simplicity which reveals at first sight that rarest of objects,—a "perfect gentleman." And, whilst she followed him with her eyes as he walked towards the Boulevard Beaumarchais, the young girl experienced feelings of joy and pride rise from the bottom of her soul. " Who would ever imagine," thought she, " that that young gentleman walking away yonder is my affianced husband, and that the day is perhaps not far off, when, having become his wife, I shall lean upon his arm. Who would think that all my thoughts belong to him, that it is for my sake that he has given up the ambition of his life, and has now another end in view ? Who would suspect that it is for Gilberte Favoral's sake that the Marquis de Trégars is walking in the Rue St. Gilles ? " And, indeed, Marius did deserve some credit for these walks ; for winter had set in, spreading a thick coat of mud over the pavement of all those little streets which are always forgotten by the street-cleaners.

The cashier's home had resumed its habits of before the war, its drowsy monotony scarcely disturbed by the Saturday dinners, by M. Desclavette's simplicity or old Desormeaux's puns. Maxence, however, no longer lived with his parents. He had returned to Paris immediately after the Commune ; and, feeling no longer in the humour to submit to the paternal despotism, he had taken a small apartment on the Boulevard du Temple ; but at the pressing instance of his mother, he had consented to come every night to dine at the Rue St. Gilles. Faithful to his promise he was working hard, though without getting on very fast. The times were far from propitious ;

and the opportunity, which he had so often allowed to escape, did not offer itself again. For lack of anything better, he had kept his clerkship at the railway; and, as two hundred francs a month were not sufficient for his wants, he spent a portion of his nights copying documents for M. Chapelain's successor.

"What do you need so much money for?" his mother said to him when she noticed his eyes a little red.

"Everything is so dear!" he answered with a smile, which was equivalent to a confidence, and yet which Madame Favoral did not understand.

He had, nevertheless, managed to pay all his debts, little by little. The day when, at last, he held in his hand the last receipted bill, he showed it proudly to his father, begging him to obtain him a berth in the Mutual Credit Bank, where with infinitely less trouble he could earn so much more. But at the first words M. Favoral commenced to giggle. "Do you take me for a fool, like your mother?" he exclaimed. "And do you think I don't know what sort of life you lead?"

"My life is that of a poor devil who works as hard as he can."

"Indeed! How is it, then, that women are constantly seen where you live, whose dresses and manners are a scandal in the neighbourhood?"

"You have been deceived, father."

"I have seen."

"It is impossible. Let me explain."

"No, you would have your trouble for nothing. You are, and you will ever remain, the same; and it would be folly on my part to introduce into an office where I enjoy the esteem of all, a fellow, who, some day or other, will be fatally dragged into the mire by some lost creature."

Such discussions were not calculated to make the relations between father and son more cordial. Several times M. Favoral had insinuated, that since Maxence lodged away from home, he might as well dine away too. And he would evidently have notified him to do so, had he not been prevented by a remnant of human respect, and the fear of gossip. On the other hand, the bitter regret of having, perhaps, marred his life, the uncertainty of the future, the penury of the moment, all the unsatisfied desires of youth, kept Maxence in a state of perpetual irritation. The excellent Madame Favoral exhausted all her arguments to quiet him. "Your father is harsh with us," she said; "but is he less harsh towards himself? He forgives nothing; but he has never needed to be forgiven himself. He does not understand youth, for he has never been young himself: at twenty he was as grave and as cold as you see him now. How can he understand what pleasure is, he who has never taken an hour's enjoyment?"

"Have I, then, been guilty of some crime, to be thus treated by my father?" exclaimed Maxence, flushed with anger. "Our existence here is an unheard-of thing. You, poor, dear mother! you have never had a five-franc-piece you could call your own. Gilberte spends her days turning her dresses, after having had them dyed. I am driven to a petty clerkship. And my father has fifty thousand francs a year!"

Such, indeed, was the figure at which the most moderate estimated M. Favoral's fortune. M. Chapelain, who was supposed to be well informed, insinuated freely that his friend Vincent, besides being the head cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank, must also be one of its principal shareholders. Now, judging from the dividend which had just been paid, the Mutual Credit Bank must, since the war, have realised enormous profits. All its enterprises had been successful; and it was on the point of negotiating a foreign

loan which would infallibly fill its exchequer to overflowing. M. Favoral, moreover, defended himself but feebly from these accusations of concealed opulence. When M. Desormeaux said to him, "Come, now, between ourselves candidly, how many millions have you?" he had such a strange way of affirming that people were very much mistaken, that his friends' convictions became only the more settled. And, as soon as they had a few thousand francs of savings, they promptly brought them to him, to invest, and were imitated in this respect by a goodly number of the small capitalists of the neighbourhood, who were wont to remark among themselves: "That man is safer than the Bank!" Millionnaire or otherwise, the cashier became daily more difficult to live with. If strangers who had but a superficial intercourse with him, if the Saturday guests themselves, noticed no appreciable change in him, his wife and his children followed with anxious surprise the modifications of his humour. Though outwardly he still appeared the same impassible, precise, and grave man, he showed himself at home more fretful than an old maid, nervous, agitated, and subject to the oddest whims. After remaining three or four days without saying a word, he would suddenly begin to speak upon all sorts of subjects with annoying volubility. Instead of watering his wine freely, as formerly, he now drank it pure, and he often took two bottles at a meal, excusing himself upon the necessity that he felt for taking some stimulant after excessive work. Then he would be seized with fits of coarse gaiety, and relate objectionable anecdotes, making use of slang expressions, which Maxence alone could understand.

On New Year's day 1872, as he sat down to breakfast, he threw on the table a roll of fifty napoleons, saying to his children: "Here is your New Year's present! Divide it, and buy anything you like." And as they were staring at him, stupid with astonishment,—“Well, what of it?” he added with an oath. “Isn't it well, once in a while, to scatter the coins a little?”

Those unexpected thousand francs Maxence and Gilberte applied to the purchase of a shawl, which their mother had longed for for over ten years. She laughed and she cried with pleasure and emotion, the poor woman; and, whilst draping it over her shoulders, she said: “Well, well, my dear children, your father, after all, is not an unkind man.”

Of that, however, they did not seem at all convinced. “What is more certain,” remarked Mademoiselle Gilberte, “is that, to permit himself such liberality, papa must be awfully rich.”

M. Favoral was not present at this scene. The yearly accounts kept him so closely confined to his office, that he remained forty-eight hours without coming home. A journey which he was compelled to undertake for M. de Thaller occupied the rest of the week. But on his return he seemed satisfied and tranquil. Without giving up his situation at the bank, he was about, he stated, to associate himself with the Messrs. Jottras, M. Saint Pavin of “The Financial Pilot,” and M. Costeclar, to undertake the construction of a foreign railway. M. Costeclar was at the head of this enterprise, the enormous profits of which were so certain and so clear, that they could be figured in advance. And, whilst on this same subject, he said to Mademoiselle Gilberte, “You were very foolish, not to make haste and marry Costeclar when he was willing to have you. You will never find another such match. A man who, in less than ten years, will be a financial power.”

The very name of Costeclar had the effect of irritating the young girl. “I thought you were no longer friends?” she observed to her father.

“Very true,” he replied with some embarrassment, “because he would

never tell me why he had withdrawn ; but people always make up their quarrels when they have interests in common."

Formerly, before the war, M. Favoral would certainly never have condescended to enter into all these details. But he was becoming almost communicative. Mademoiselle Gilberte, who observed him with interested attention, fancied she could see that he was yielding to that necessity for expansion, more powerful than the will itself, which besets the man who carries within him a weighty secret. Whilst for twenty years he had, so to speak, never breathed a word on the subject of the De Thaller family, he now continually spoke of them. He told his Saturday guests all about the baron's princely style, the number of his servants and horses, the colour of his liveries, the parties that he gave, what he spent for pictures and objects of art, and even the very names of his mistresses ; for the baron had too much respect for himself not to lay every year a few thousand napoleons at the feet of some young lady sufficiently conspicuous to be mentioned in the society newspapers. M. Favoral admitted that he did not approve the baron ; but it was with a sort of bitter hatred that he spoke of the baroness. It was impossible, he told his guests, to estimate even approximately the fabulous sums squandered by her, scattered, thrown to the four winds. For she was not merely prodigal, she was prodigality itself, that idiotic, absurd, unconscious prodigality which melts a fortune with a turn of the hand, which cannot even obtain from money the satisfaction of a single want, wish, or fancy. He told incredible things of her, things which made Madame Desclavettes jump upon her seat, explaining that he learned all these details from M. de Thaller, who had often commissioned him to pay his wife's debts, and also from the baroness herself, who did not hesitate to call sometimes at the office for twenty francs ; for such was her want of order, that, after borrowing all the savings of her servants, she was frequently without a copper to throw to a beggar.

Neither did the cashier seem to have a very good opinion of Mademoiselle de Thaller. Brought up at hap-hazard, in the kitchen much more than in the school-room, until she was twelve years old, and, later on, dragged by her mother no matter where : to the races, to first nights at the theatres, to watering places, or the sea-side, always escorted by a squadron of young men connected with the Bourse. Mademoiselle de Thaller had adopted a style which would have been deemed detestable in a young man. As soon as some questionable fashion appeared, she appropriated it at once, never finding anything eccentric enough to make herself conspicuous. She rode, fenced, frequented pigeon shooting matches, spoke slang, sang Thérèse's songs, neatly emptied her glass of champagne, and smoked her cigarette. The guests were astounded.

"But those people must spend millions !" interrupted M. Chapelain.

M. Favoral started as if he had been slapped on the back. "Pooh !" he answered. "They are so rich, so awfully rich !"

He changed the conversation that evening ; but on the following Saturday, at the beginning of dinner he said : "I believe, that M. de Thaller has just discovered a husband for his daughter."

"My compliments !" exclaimed M. Desormeaux. "And who may this bold fellow be?"

"A nobleman, of course," he replied. "Isn't that the tradition ? As soon as a financier has made his little million, he starts in quest of a ruined nobleman to make a husband for his daughter."

One of those painful presentiments, such as arise in the inmost recesses of

the soul, caused Gilberte to turn pale. This presentiment suggested to her an absurd, ridiculous, unlikely thing, and yet she was sure that it would not deceive her; so sure, indeed, that she rose from the table under the pretext of looking for something in the sideboard, but in reality to conceal the terrible emotion which she anticipated.

"And this nobleman?" inquired M. Chapelain.

"Is a marquis, if you please,—the Marquis de Trégars."

Well, yes, it was this very name that Gilberte was expecting, and well that she did; for she was thus able to command enough control over herself to check the cry that rose to her lips.

"But this marriage is not settled yet," pursued M. Favoral. "This marquis is not yet so completely ruined, that he can be made to do anything they please. True, the baroness has set her heart upon it, oh! but with all her might!"

A discussion arose which prevented Gilberte from learning any more; and as soon as the dinner, which seemed eternal to her, was over, she complained of a violent headache, and withdrew to her room. She shook with fever; her teeth chattered. And yet she could not believe that Marius was betraying her, nor that he could have the thought of marrying such a girl as M. Favoral had described, and for money too! No, it was not possible! Although she well remembered that Marius had made her swear to believe nothing that might be said of him, she spent a most unhappy Sunday, and she felt like throwing herself in Signor Gismondo's arms, when, in giving her her lesson on the Monday, he said: "My poor pupil is utterly wretched. Some one has stated that he is about to marry a person of whom he has a perfect horror; and he trembles lest the rumour may reach his intended in the country, whom he loves exclusively."

Mademoiselle Gilberte ought to have felt reassured after that. And yet in her heart there remained an invincible sadness. She could hardly doubt that this matrimonial scheme was a part of the plan devised by Marius to recover his fortune. But why, then, had he applied to M. de Thaller? Who could be the people who had despoiled the Marquis de Trégars? Such were the thoughts which occupied her mind on that Saturday evening when the commissary of police presented himself at the house of the Rue St. Gilles to arrest M. Favoral, charged with embezzling ten or twelve millions. For the hour had struck for the explanation of that home tragedy which was being enacted in one of the quietest quarters of Paris.

XXII.

THE disaster which struck Madame Favoral and her children had been so sudden and so crushing, that they were, at the moment, too amazed to realise it. What had happened went so far beyond the limits of the probable, of the possible even, that they could not believe it. The events which had just taken place were to them like the absurd incidents of a horrible nightmare. But when their guests had retired after a few common-place protestations, when they found themselves alone, then only, as the disturbed equilibrium of their minds became somewhat restored, did they fully understand the extent of the disaster that had befallen them, and the horror of their situation. Whilst Madame Favoral lay apparently lifeless in an arm-chair, with Gilberte kneeling at her feet, Maxence paced up and down the room with furious steps. He was whiter than the plaster on the

ceiling, and a cold perspiration glued his tangled hair to his temples. With glistening eyes and clinched fists he kept repeating in a hoarse voice : " Our father a thief ! A forger ! "

In fact, the slightest suspicion had never arisen in his mind. In those days of doubtful reputations, he had been proud indeed of M. Favoral's reputation of austere integrity. And he had endured many a cruel reproach, saying to himself that his father had, by his own spotless conduct, acquired the right to be harsh and exacting. " And he has stolen twelve millions ! " he exclaimed. And he tried to calculate all the luxury and splendour which such a sum represents, all the cravings gratified, all the dreams realised, all it can procure of things that may be bought. And what things are there that cannot be obtained for twelve millions ? Then he examined their gloomy home in the Rue St. Gilles, the small rooms, the faded furniture, the prodigies of a parsimonious industry, his mother's privations, his sister's penury, and his own distress. And he exclaimed again : " It is a monstrous infamy ! "

The words of the commissary of police had opened his eyes ; and he now imagined the most extraordinary things. In his mind M. Favoral assumed fabulous proportions. By what miracles of hypocrisy and dissimulation had he succeeded in making himself ubiquitous as it were, and, without awaking a suspicion, living two lives so distinct and so different, at home, in the midst of his family, parsimonious, methodic, and severe ; elsewhere, in some illicit household, doubtless, pleasant, smiling, and generous, like a successful thief ? For Maxence considered the invoices found in M. Favoral's secretary a flagrant, irrefutable and material proof. Upon the brink of that abyss of shame into which his father had just tumbled, he thought he could see, not only the inevitable woman, that incentive of all men's actions, but the entire legion of those bewitching courtesans who possess unknown crucibles wherein to melt fortunes, and secret filters with which to stupify their dupes, and strip them of their honour, after robbing them of their last sou.

" And I," said Maxence, " because I at twenty was fond of pleasure, I was called a bad son ! Because I had made a few hundred francs of debts, I was deemed a swindler ! Because I love a poor girl who entertains for me the most disinterested affection, I am one of those rascals whom their family disown, and from whom nothing can be expected but shame and disgrace ! "

He filled the room with the sound of his voice, which rose with his wrath. And at the thought of all the bitter reproaches which had been addressed to him by his father, and of all the humiliations that had been heaped upon him, he fairly shrieked : " Ah, the wretch, the coward ! "

As pale as her brother, her face bathed in tears, and her beautiful hair falling over her shoulders, Gilberte rose from the ground. " He is our father, Maxence," she said gently.

But he interrupted her with a wild burst of laughter. " True," he answered ; " and, according to the law, we owe him affection and respect. "

" Maxence ! " murmured the young girl in a beseeching tone.

But he went on, nevertheless, " Yes, he is our father, unfortunately. Yet I should like to know his titles to our respect and our affection. After making our mother the most miserable of human beings, he has embittered our existence, withered our youth, ruined my future, and done his best to spoil yours by compelling you to marry Costeclar. And to crown all these deeds of kindness, he runs away now, after stealing twelve millions, leaving us nothing but poverty and a disgraced name. "

After a moment's silence, he added: "And yet, is it possible that a cashier can take twelve millions, and his employer know nothing of it? And is our father really the only one who has benefited by these millions?"

Then came back to the minds of Maxence and Gilberte their father's last words at the moment of his flight: "I have been betrayed; and I must suffer for all!" And his sincerity could hardly be called in question, for he was then in one of those decisive moments in which the truth forces itself out in spite of all calculation. "He must have accomplices then!" murmured Maxence.

Although he had spoken very low, Madame Favoral overheard him. To defend her husband, she found a remnant of energy, and, sitting up in her chair, she stammered forth: "Ah! do not doubt it. Left to himself your father would never have done wrong. He has been circumvented, led as tray, duped!"

"That may be, but by whom?"

"By Costeclar!" affirmed Gilberte.

"By the Messrs. Jottras, the bankers," said Madame Favoral, "and also by M. Saint-Pavin, the editor of 'The Financial Pilot.'"

"Yes! and by all of them, evidently," interrupted Maxence, "even by his manager, M. de Thaller!"

When a man is at the bottom of a precipice, what is the use of finding out how he got there, whether by stumbling over a stone, or slipping on a tuft of grass! And yet it is always our foremost thought. It was with an eager obstinacy that Madame Favoral and her children examined the whole course of their existence, seeking in the past the incidents and the merest words which might throw some light upon their misfortune; for it was quite manifest that it was not in one day and at the same time that twelve millions had been stolen from the Mutual Credit Bank. This enormous deficit must have been, as usual, withdrawn gradually, with infinite caution at first, whilst there was the intention, and the hope, of making it good again; then with mad recklessness towards the end, when the catastrophe had become inevitable.

"Alas!" murmured Madame Favoral, "why did not your father listen to my presentiments on that ever fatal day when he brought M. de Thaller, M. Jottras, and M. Saint-Pavin to dine here? They promised him a fortune."

Maxence and Gilberte were too young at the time of that dinner to have preserved any recollection of it; but they remembered many other circumstances, which at the time they had taken place, had not struck them. They now understood their father's strange behaviour, his perpetual irritation and his spasmodic temper. When his friends were heaping insults upon him, he had exclaimed: "Be it so! let them arrest me; and to-night, for the first time in many years, I shall sleep in peace." There were years, then, that he had lived as it were upon burning coals, trembling at the fear of discovery, and wondering, as he went to sleep each night, whether he would not be awakened by the rude hand of the police tapping him on the shoulder.

No one better than Madame Favoral could affirm it. "Your father, my children," she said, "had long since lost his sleep. There was hardly ever a night that he did not get up and walk the room for hours."

They understood, now, his efforts to compel Gilberte to marry M. Costeclar. "He thought that Costeclar would help him out of the scrape," suggested Maxence to his sister,

The poor girl shuddered at the thought, and she could not help feeling thankful to her father for not having told her his situation; for would she have had the sublime courage to refuse to sacrifice herself if her father had said to her: "I have stolen! I am lost! Costeclar alone can save me; and he will save me if you become his wife."

M. Favoral's pleasant behaviour during the siege was quite natural. Then he had no fears; and one could understand, how in the most critical hours of the Commune, when Paris was in flames, he had exclaimed almost cheerfully: "Ah! this time it is indeed the final liquidation." Doubtless, in the bottom of his heart, he wished that Paris might be destroyed, and, with it, the evidences of his crime. And perhaps he was not the only one to form that impious wish.

"That's why, then," exclaimed Maxence, "that's why my father treated me so roughly; that's why he so obstinately persisted in closing the doors of his office against me."

He was interrupted by a violent ringing of the door-bell. He looked at the clock; it was on the stroke of ten. "Who can call so late?" asked Madame Favoral.

Something like a discussion was heard on the landing, a voice hoarse with anger and the servant's voice. "Go and see who's there," said Gilberte to her brother.

It was useless; the servant appeared. "It's M. Bertau," she commenced, "the baker."

He had followed her, and, pushing her aside with his robust arm, he appeared himself. He was a man about forty years of age, tall, thin, already bald, and wearing his beard close trimmed. "M. Favoral?" he inquired.

"My father is not at home, sir," replied Maxence.

"It's true, then, what I have just been told?"

"What?"

"That the police came to arrest him, and he escaped through a window."

"It is true," replied Maxence gently.

The baker seemed astounded. "And my money," he asked.

"What money?"

"Why, my ten thousand francs of course! Ten thousand francs which I brought to M. Favoral in gold, do you hear? in ten rolls, which I placed there, on that very table, and for which he gave me a receipt. Here it is, his receipt."

He held out a paper, but Maxence did not take it. "I do not doubt your word, sir," he replied; "but my father's business is not ours."

"You refuse to give me back my money?"

"Neither my mother, my sister, nor myself, possess anything."

The blood rushed to the man's face, and, with a tongue swollen by passion, he exclaimed: "And you think you are going to pay me in that way. You have nothing! Poor little fellow! And will you tell me, then, what has become of the twenty millions your father has stolen? For he has stolen twenty millions. I know it: I have been told so. Where are they?"

"The police, sir, have placed the seals over all my father's papers."

"The police?" interrupted the baker, "the seals? What do I care for that? It's my money I want: do you hear? Justice is going to take a hand in it, is it? Arrest your father, try him? What good will that do me? He will be condemned to two or three years' imprisonment. Will that

give me a centime? He will serve out his time quietly; and, when he comes out of prison, he'll get hold of the pile that he's hidden away somewhere; and, while I starve, he'll spend my money under my very nose. No, no! That won't do at all; I wish to be paid at once." And throwing himself upon a chair, he leant back and stretched out his legs, and declared: "I am not going out of here until I am paid."

It was not without the greatest efforts that Maxence managed to keep his temper. "Your insults are useless, sir," he began.

The man jumped up from his seat. "Insults!" he cried in a voice that could have been heard all over the house. "Do you call it an insult when a man claims his own? If you think you can make me hold my tongue, you are mistaken in your man, M. Favoral, junior. I am not rich myself: my father did not steal to leave me an income. It was not in gambling at the Bourse that I made those ten thousand francs. It was by the sweat of my body, by working hard night and day for years, by depriving myself of a glass of wine when I was thirsty. And I am to lose them? By the holy name of heaven, we'll see about that! If everybody was like me, there would not be so many scoundrels going about, their pockets filled with other people's money, and from the seats of their carriages laughing at the poor fools they have ruined. Come, my ten thousand francs, you beggar, or I pay myself on your back."

Maxence, enraged, was about to throw himself upon the man, and a disgusting struggle would have been the result, when Gilberte stepped between them. "Your threats are as cowardly as your insults, M. Bertau," she said in a quivering voice. "You have known us long enough to be aware that we knew nothing of our father's business, and that we have nothing of ourselves. All we can do is to give up to our creditors our very last crumb. That shall be done. And now, sir, please retire."

There was so much dignity in her sorrow, and so imposing was her attitude, that the baker stood abashed. "Ah! if that's the way," he stammered awkwardly, "and since you meddle with it, mademoiselle—" and he hastily beat a retreat, growling at the same time threats and excuses, and slamming the doors after him hard enough to break the panels.

"What a disgrace!" murmured Madame Favoral.

Crushed by this last scene, she was choking; and her children had to carry her to the open window. She recovered almost at once; but then, through the darkness, dreary and cold, she had like a vision of her husband, and, throwing herself back in her chair, she muttered: "O great heavens! where did he go when he left us? Where is he now? What is he doing? What has become of him?"

Her married life had been but a slow torture to Madame Favoral. It was in vain that she looked back through the past for some of those happy days which leave their luminous trace in life, and towards which the mind turns in the hours of grief. Vincent Favoral had never been aught but a brutal despot, taking advantage of his victim's resignation. And yet, had he died, she would have wept bitterly for him in all the sincerity of her good and simple heart. Mere habit! Prisoners have been known to shed tears over their jailer's coffin. Then too he was her husband, after all, the father of her children, the only man who existed for her. For twenty-six years they had never been separated; they had sat at the same table; they had slept side by side. Yes, she would have wept over him. But how much less poignant would her grief have been than at this moment, when it was complicated by all the torments of uncertainty, and by the

most frightful apprehensions ! Fearing lest she might take cold, her children removed her to the sofa, and there, all shivering, she said to them : " Isn't it horrible not to know anything of your father, or his whereabouts ? to think that at this very moment, perhaps, pursued by the police, he is wandering in despair through the streets, without daring to ask anywhere for shelter ? "

Her children had no time to answer and comfort her ; for at this moment the door-bell rang again.

" Who can it be now ? " asked Madame Favoral with a start.

This time there was no discussion on the landing. Footsteps resounded on the floor of the dining-room ; the door opened, and M. Desclavettes, the old bronze-merchant, walked, or rather glided into the drawing-room. Hope, fear, anger, all the sentiments which agitated his mind, could be read on his pale and pitiful face. With a miserable smile, he said : " It is I. "

Maxence stepped forward. " Have you any news of my father, sir ? " he asked.

" No, " replied the old merchant, " I confess I have not ; and I just came to see if you had any yourselves. Oh, I know very well that this is not exactly the right hour to call at a house ; but I thought, that, after what took place this evening, you would not be in bed yet. I cannot sleep myself. You understand, a friendship of twenty years' standing ! So I took Madame Desclavettes home, and here I am. "

" We feel very thankful for your sympathy, " murmured Madame Favoral.

" No doubt. The fact is, you see, I take a good deal of interest in the misfortune that strikes you, a greater interest than anyone else. For, after all, I too am a victim. I had intrusted one hundred and twenty thousand francs to our dear Vincent. "

" Alas, sir ! " said Mademoiselle Gilberte.

But the worthy man did not allow her to proceed. " I do not reproach him with anything, " he went on. " Why, dear me ! haven't I been in business myself, and don't I know what it is ? First we borrow a thousand francs or so from the cash box, then ten thousand, then a hundred thousand. Oh ! without any bad intention, to be sure, and with the firm resolution to return them. But we are not always able to do what we wish to do. Circumstances sometimes work against us ; if we operate on the Bourse to make up the deficit, we lose. Then we must borrow again, draw from Peter to pay Paul. Then we are afraid of being found out ; we are compelled, reluctantly of course, to alter the books. At last a day comes when we find that millions are wanting, and the bomb-shell bursts. Does it follow from this that a man is dishonest ? Not the least in the world : he is simply unlucky. " He stopped, as if awaiting an answer ; but, as none came, he resumed, " I repeat, I do not reproach Favoral with anything. But really, now, between us, to lose these hundred and twenty thousand francs would simply be a serious disaster for me. I know very well that both Chapelain and Desormeaux had also deposited funds with Vincent. But they are rich : one of them owns three houses in Paris, and the other has a good situation. Whereas I, if I lose these hundred and twenty thousand francs, I shall have nothing left but my eyes to weep with. My wife is dying about it. I assure you our position is a terrible one. "

Maxence said to M. Desclavettes, as he had said to the baker a few moments before ?—" We have nothing, sir. "

" I know it, " exclaimed the old man. " I know it as well as you do yourself. And therefore I have only come to beg a little favour of you, which

will cost you nothing. When you see Favoral again, remember me to him, explain my position to him, and try to get him to give me back my money. He is a difficult one to deal with, that's a fact ; but, however, if you go the right way to work, above all, if our dear Gilberte will take the matter in hand—"

"Sir !"

"Oh ! I swear I shan't say a word about it, either to Desormeaux or Chapelain, nor to anyone else in the world, Although re-imbursed, I'll make as much noise as the others, more noise, even. Come now, my dear friends, what do you say ?" He was almost crying.

"And where the deuce, sir," exclaimed Maxence, "do you expect my father to find a hundred and twenty thousand francs ? Didn't you see him go without even taking the money that M. de Thaller brought ?"

A smile re-appeared upon M. Desclavettes' pale lips. "Tell that to the public, my dear Maxence ;" he said, "and some people may believe it. But don't say it to your old friend, who knows too much about business to be taken in by it. When a man bolts, after borrowing twelve millions from his employers, he would be a great fool if he had not put two or three away in safety. Now, Favoral is no fool."

Thus the retired bronze merchant had formed the same suspicion as the baker. Tears of shame and anger started from Gilberte's eyes. "What you are saying is abominable, sir," she exclaimed.

He seemed much surprised at her vehemence. "Why so ?" he asked. "In Vincent's place, I should most decidedly not have hesitated to do what he has certainly done. And when I say so you may believe me, for I am an honest man. I was in business for twenty years ; and I dare anyone to prove that a bill accepted by Desclavettes was ever protested. And so, my dear friends, I beseech you, consent to serve your old friend, save him from ruin, and, when you see Vincent—"

The old man's meek tone of voice exasperated even Madame Favoral. "We shall never see my husband again," she exclaimed.

He shrugged his shoulders, and, in a tone of paternal reproach—"You just give up such an unpleasant idea," he said. "You will see dear Vincent again, for he is much too sharp to allow himself to be caught. Of course, he'll stay away as long as it may be necessary ; but, as soon as he can return without danger, he will do so. Why, the Boulevards are crowded with people who have all had their little difficulty, and who have spent five or ten years abroad for the benefit of their health. Are they any the worse for that ? Not in the least ; and no one hesitates to shake hands with them. Besides, those things are so soon forgotten !"

He continued talking as if he never intended to stop ; and it was not without great trouble that Maxence and Gilberte succeeded in getting rid of him, very much dissatisfied to see his request so ill received. It was past twelve o'clock. Maxence was anxious to return to his own home ; but, at the pressing instances of his mother, he consented to remain, and threw himself, without undressing, on the bed in his old room. "What will to-morrow bring forth ?" he asked himself.

XXIII.

AFTER a few hours of that leaden sleep which follows great catastrophes, Madame Favoral and her children were awakened early on the morning of the following day, which was Sunday, by the furious clamours of an exasperated crowd. Loud blows upon the outer door were mingled with the stamping of feet, the oaths of men, and the screams of women. And, above this confused and continuous tumult, such vociferations as these could be distinguished: "I tell you they are at home!" "Robbers, swindlers, thieves!" "We want to go in, we will go in!" "Let the wife come then; we intend to see her, we must speak to her!"

Occasionally there was a lull, during which the plaintive voice of the servant girl could be heard; but almost immediately the cries and the threats would recommence, louder than ever. Maxence, being ready first, hurried to the drawing-room, where his mother and sister soon joined him, with pale faces and eyes swollen by sleep and by tears. Madame Favoral was trembling so much that she was unable to fasten her dress. "Do you hear?" she asked in a choking voice.

From the drawing-room, which was divided from the dining-room by folding-doors, they did not miss a single insult. "Well," said Gilberte coldly, "what else could we expect? If Bertau came alone last night, it was because he alone had been informed. The others are come now. And," addressing her brother, "You must see them," she added, "speak to them."

But Maxence did not stir. The idea of facing the insults and the curses of these enraged creditors was too repugnant to him.

"Would you rather let them break in the door?" asked Gilberte. "It won't take long."

He hesitated no longer. Gathering all his courage, he hurried into the dining-room. The disorder was beyond limits. The table had been pushed into a corner, the chairs were upset. There were some thirty of them, men and women, concierges, tradesmen, and small householders of the neighbourhood, with flushed faces and staring eyes, and gesticulating like madmen, and shaking their clenched fists at the ceiling.

"Gentlemen," commenced Maxence

But his voice was drowned by the most frightful shouts. He had hardly entered the room when he was so closely surrounded that he had been unable to close the door behind him, and, before being able to say a word, he found himself pushed into the embrasure of a window.

"My father, gentlemen," he resumed.

Again he was interrupted. There were three or four in front of him, who were endeavouring to establish their own claims clearly. They were all speaking at once, each one raising his own voice so as to drown those of the others. And yet, amidst their confused explanations, one could manage to make out how the cashier had duped them. In the early days, it was only with great reluctance that he consented to take charge of the funds which were offered to him; and then he never accepted anything less than ten thousand francs, being always careful to say, that, not being a sorcerer,

he would not answer for anything, and might make a mistake, like any one else. Since the Commune, however, and with a duplicity of which he could never have been suspected, he had used all his ingenuity to entice deposits. Under some pretext or other he would call among the neighbours and the tradespeople, and, after lamenting with them about the hard times and the difficulty of making money, he always ended by holding up to them the dazzling profits which are yielded by certain investments unknown to the public. If these very proceedings had not betrayed him, it is because he recommended to each person the most inviolable secrecy, saying, that, at the slightest indiscretion, he would be assailed with requests to invest money, and that it would be impossible for him to do for all what he did for one. He took moreover everything that was offered him, even the most insignificant amounts, affirming, with the most imperturbable assurance, that he knew how to double or treble them in a very short time without the slightest risk. The catastrophe having come, the smaller creditors showed themselves as usual, the most exasperated and the most intractable. The less money one has, the more anxious one is to keep it. There was an old newspaper-vendor there, who had placed in M. Favoral's hands all she possessed in the world, the savings of her entire life, five hundred francs. Clinging desperately to Maxence, she beseeched him to restore them to her, swearing that if he did not there would be nothing left for her to do except to throw herself into the river. Her groans and her lamentations exasperated the other creditors. That the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank should have embezzled millions, they could well understand, they said. But that he could have robbed this poor woman of her five hundred francs, was more mean, more cowardly, and more vile than anything that could be imagined; and the law had no punishment severe enough for such a crime.

"Give her back her five hundred francs!" they cried.

For there was not one of them but would have wagered his head that M. Favoral had lots of money hidden away; and some went even so far as to state that it was in the house, and if they looked about for it, they would find it. Maxence, who was greeted with jeers every time he opened his mouth, was at a loss what to do, when, in the midst of this hostile crowd, he perceived M. Chapelain's friendly face. Driven from his bed at daylight by bitter regrets at the heavy loss he had sustained, the ex-lawyer had arrived in the Rue St. Gilles at the very moment when the creditors invaded M. Favoral's apartments. Standing behind the crowd, he had seen and heard everything without uttering a word; and, if he interfered now, it was because he thought things were about to take an ugly turn.

He was well known; and, as soon as he showed himself, they shouted on all sides: "He is one of the wretch's friends!"

But he was not the man to be so easily frightened. He had seen many such cases during the twenty years that he had practised law, and had been mixed up in all the sinister comedies and grotesque dramas of money. He knew how to speak to infuriated creditors, how to handle them, and what strings can be made to vibrate within them. In the most quiet tone, he replied: "Certainly, I was Favoral's intimate friend; and the proof is, that he has treated me more amicably than the rest. I have been let in for a hundred and sixty thousand francs."

By this statement alone he conquered the sympathies of the crowd. He was a brother in misfortune; they respected him. He was, as they all knew, a skilful lawyer, they therefore stopped their clamours to listen to him. He at once asked these invaders in a peremptory tone what they

were doing there, and what they wanted. Did they not know to what they exposed themselves in violating a domicile ! What would have happened, if, instead of stopping to explain to them, Maxence had sent for the commissary of police ? Was it to Madame Favoral and her children that they had intrusted their funds ? No ! What then did they want with them ? Was there by chance among them some of those shrewd fellows who always try to get themselves paid in full, to the detriment of the others ? This last insinuation proved sufficient to break up the perfect accord that had hitherto existed among the creditors. Distrust arose ; suspicious glances were exchanged ; and, as the old newspaper woman, whom they had pitied so much but a few moments before, was keeping up her groans, "Why should you be paid before us ?" two women asked her roughly. "Our rights are just as good as yours !"

"And, moreover," resumed the ex-lawyer, prompt to avail himself of the dispositions of the crowd, "in whom did we place our confidence ? Was it in Favoral the private individual ? To a certain extent, yes ; but it was much more in the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank. Therefore that establishment owes us, at least, some explanations. And this is not all. Are we really so badly burned, that we should scream so loud ? What do we know about it ? That Favoral is charged with embezzlement, that the police came to arrest him, and that he ran away. Does it follow that our money is lost ? I hope not. And so what should we do ? Act prudently, and wait patiently for justice to do its work."

By this time, the creditors were slipping out one by one ; and soon the servant closed the door on the last of them. Then Madame Favoral, Maxence, and Gilberte surrounded M. Chapelain, and, pressing his hands, said : "How thankful we feel, sir, for the service you have just rendered us !"

But the ex-lawyer seemed in no wise proud of his victory. "Do not thank me," he said. "I have only done my duty, what any honest man would have done in my place."

And yet, under the appearance of impassible indifference, acquired by the long practice of a profession which leaves no illusions, he evidently felt a real emotion. "It is you whom I pity," he added, "and with all my soul,—you, madame, you, my dear Gilberte, and you, too, Maxence. Never before have I so well understood to what degree is guilty the head of a family who leaves his wife and children exposed to the consequences of his misdoings."

He ceased speaking. The servant was doing her best to put the dining-room in some sort of order, wheeling the table back into its place, and lifting up the chairs which had been overturned.

"What a pillage !" she grumbled. "Neighbours too, people from whom we bought our things ! But they were worse than savages ; it was impossible to do anything with them !"

"Don't worry yourself, my good girl," said M. Chapelain : "they won't come back any more !"

Madame Favoral looked as though she were about to drop down on her knees before him. "How very kind you are !" she murmured : "you are not too angry with poor Vincent !"

With the look of a man who has made up his mind to make the best of a disaster that he cannot help, M. Chapelain shrugged his shoulders. "I am more angry with myself," he exclaimed in a surly tone. "An old hawk like me should not have allowed himself to be caught in a pigeon trap ! I am inexcusable. But one wants to get rich. It's slow work earning money

by working, and it's so much easier to get the money already earned out of our neighbour's pocket. I was unable to resist the temptation myself. It serves me right; and I should say it was a good lesson, if it did not cost so dear!"

So much philosophy could hardly have been expected of him.

"All my father's friends are not as indulgent as you are, sir," said Maxence. "M. Desclavettes, for instance."

"Have you seen him since?"

"Yes, last night, about twelve o'clock. He came to ask us to get father to pay him back, if we should ever see him again."

"That is not a bad idea?"

Mademoiselle Gilberte started. "What!" she exclaimed, "you, too, sir, can imagine that my father has run away with millions?"

The ex-lawyer shook his head, "I imagine nothing," he answered. "Favoral has taken me in so completely—me, who had the pretension of being a judge of men—that nothing from him, either for good or for evil, could surprise me hereafter."

Madame Favoral was about to offer some objection; but he stopped her with a gesture.

"And yet," he went on, "I'd bet that he has gone off with empty pockets. His recent behaviour reveals a frightful penury. Had he had a few thousand francs at his command, would he have extorted five hundred francs from a poor old woman, a wretched newspaper-vendor? What did he want with the money? Try his luck once more, no doubt."

He had seated himself, and his elbow resting upon the arm of his chair, his face buried in his hand, he remained thinking; and the contraction of his features indicated the great tension of his mind. Suddenly he jumped up. "But where's the use," he exclaimed, "of wandering in idle conjectures? What do we know about Favoral? Nothing. One entire side of his existence escapes us—that fantastic side, of which the insane prodigalities and inconceivable disorders have been revealed to us by the bills found in his desk. He is certainly guilty; but is he as guilty as we think? and, above all, is he alone guilty? Was it solely for himself that he embezzled all this money? Are the missing millions really lost? and would it not be possible to find the greater part of them in the pocket of some accomplice? Skilful men do not expose themselves. They have at their command poor wretches, sacrificed in advance, and who, in exchange for a few crumbs that are thrown to them, risk the criminal court, are condemned, and sent to prison."

"That's just what I was telling my mother and sister, sir," interrupted Maxence.

"And that's what I am telling myself," continued the ex-lawyer. "I have been thinking over and over again of last evening's events; and strange doubts have entered my mind. For a man who has been robbed of several millions, M. de Thaller seemed remarkably quiet and self-possessed. Favoral appeared to me singularly calm for a man charged with embezzlement and forgery. M. de Thaller, as manager of the Mutual Credit Bank is really responsible for the stolen funds, and, as such, should have been anxious to secure the guilty party, and to produce him. Instead of that, he wished him to go, and actually brought him the money to enable him to leave. Was he in hopes of hushing up the affair? Evidently not, since the police had been notified. On the other hand, Favoral seemed much more angry than surprised by the occurrence. It was only on the appearance of the com-

missary of police that he seems to have lost his head ; and then some very strange words escaped him which I cannot understand."

He was walking about the drawing-room at random, apparently rather answering the objections of his own mind than addressing himself to Madame Favoral or her children, who were listening, nevertheless, with all the attention of which they were capable.

"It is incredible !" he continued. "An old stager like me to be taken in thus ! Evidently there is, under all this, one of those diabolical combinations which time even fails to unravel. We ought to search, to enquire—" And then, suddenly stopping in front of Maxence, he asked : "How much money did M. de Thaller bring to your father last night ?"

"Fifteen thousand francs."

"Where are they ?"

"Put away in my mother's room."

"When do you intend to take them back to M. de Thaller ?"

"To-morrow."

"Why not to-day ?"

"It is Sunday. His office will be closed."

"After what has happened, M. de Thaller is sure to be at his office. Besides, haven't you his private address ?"

"Yes, I have."

The old fellow's little eyes were shining with unusual brilliancy. He certainly felt deeply the loss of his money ; but the idea that he had been swindled for the benefit of some clever rascal, was absolutely insupportable to him. "If we were wise," he resumed, "we'd do this. Madame Favoral would take these fifteen thousand francs, I would offer her my arm, and we would go together, she and I, to see M. de Thaller."

It was an unexpected good-fortune for Madame Favoral that M. Chapelain should be willing to assist her. So, without hesitating, she said : "The time to dress, sir, and I am ready."

She hastened to leave the drawing-room, but, as she reached her own room, her son joined her. "I am obliged to go out, dear mother," he said ; "and I shall probably not be home to lunch."

She looked at him with a look of painful surprise. "What," she exclaimed, "at such a moment !"

"I am expected at my lodging."

"By whom ?" He did not answer, and then, all the reproaches his father had addressed to him came to her mind. "A woman ?" she murmured.

"Well, yes."

"And it is for that woman's sake that you are going to leave your sister alone at home ?"

"I must, mother, I assure you ; and, if you only knew—"

"I do not wish to know anything."

But his mind was made up. He went off ; and a few moments later Madame Favoral and M. Chapelain entered a cab which had been sent for, and drove to M. de Thaller's.

XXIV.

LEFT alone, Mademoiselle Gilberte had but one thought—to inform M. de Trégars of what had taken place, and to hear from him. Anything seemed preferable to the horrible anxiety which oppressed her. She had just com-

menced a letter, which she intended to send under cover to the Count de Villegré, when a violent ring of the bell made her start; and almost immediately the servant entered the room, saying: "There is a gentleman who wishes to see you, mademoiselle, a friend of master's, M. Costeclar."

Gilberte started to her feet, trembling with excitement. "This is too much impudence!" she exclaimed.

She was hesitating whether to refuse him the door, or to see him, and dismiss him ignominiously herself, when she had a sudden inspiration. "What does he want!" she thought. "Why not see him, and try and find out what he knows? For he certainly must know the truth."

But there was no longer time to deliberate. Above the servant's shoulder M. Costeclar's pale and impudent face showed itself. The girl having stepped aside, he appeared, hat in hand. Although it was long before nine o'clock, he was got up in the most irreproachable style. He had already passed through the hairdresser's hands; and his hair was brought forward over his low forehead with the most elaborate care. He wore a pair of those ridiculous trousers which grow wide from the knees down, and which were invented by Prussian tailors to hide their customers' ugly feet. Under his light over-coat, could be seen a short velvet-faced coat, with a rose in the button-hole.

However, he remained motionless at the threshold of the door, attempting to smile, and muttering one of those sentences which are never intended to be finished. "I beg you to believe, mademoiselle—your mother's absence—my most respectful admiration—"

In fact, he was taken aback by the disorder of the girl's toilette—disorder which she had had no time to repair since the clamours of the creditors had roused her from her bed. She had on a long brown cashmere dressing-gown, fitting close round the hips, and setting off the elegance of her figure, the maidenly perfections of her waist, and the exquisite contour of her neck. Gathered up in haste, her thick light hair had escaped from the pins, and spread over her shoulders in luminous cascades. Never had she appeared to M. Costeclar as lovely as at this moment, when her whole frame was vibrating with suppressed indignation, her cheeks flushed, her eyes flashing.

"Please to enter, sir," she uttered.

He stepped forward, no longer bowing humbly as formerly, but holding himself erect, with his chest thrown out, and ill-concealing a look of gratified vanity.

"I did not expect the honour of your visit, sir," said the young girl.

He rapidly passed his hat and his cane from his right hand into his left, and then, placing his right hand upon his heart, and raising his eyes to the ceiling, he exclaimed, with all the depth of expression of which he was capable: "It is in times of adversity that we know our real friends, mademoiselle. Those upon whom we think we can rely the most, often, at the first reverse, take flight forever!"

She trembled from head to foot. Was this an allusion to Marius?

The other, changing his tone, resumed: "It was only last night that I heard of poor Favoral's discomfiture at the little Bourse on the Boulevards where I had gone for news. It was the general topic of conversation. Twelve millions! That's a big sum. The Mutual Credit Bank may not be able to keep afloat. From 580, at which its shares were quoted before the news, they dropped at eight o'clock to below 300. At nine o'clock, there were no takers at 180. And yet, if there is nothing beyond what they say, at 180 I am for it."

Was he forgetting himself, or pretending to ?

"But excuse me, mademoiselle," he added : "that's not what I came to say."

"Ah !"

"I came to ask you for news of poor Favoral."

"We have none, sir."

"Then it is true : he succeeded in getting away by the window ?"

"Yes."

"And he did not tell you where he meant to hide ?"

"No."

Observing M. Costeclar with all her power of penetration, Gilberte fancied she discovered in him something like surprise mingled with joy.

"And Favoral must have left without a sou !"

"They accuse him of having taken away millions, sir ; but I would swear that it is not so."

M. Costeclar approved with a nod. "I am of the same opinion," he declared, "unless—but no, he was not the man to try such a game. And yet—but again no, he was too closely watched. Besides, there were other things that exhausted all his resources."

Gilberte, hoping that she was going to learn something, made an effort to preserve her indifference. "What do you mean ?" she inquired.

He looked at her, smiled, and, in a light tone, answered : "Oh, nothing, only some conjectures of my own." And throwing himself into an arm-chair, his head leaning back, he continued : "But that is not the object of my visit either. Favoral is done for, don't let us say anything more about him. Whether he has got the money or not, I can tell you you'll never see him again : he is as good as dead. Let us, therefore, talk of the living, of yourself. What's going to become of you ?"

"I do not understand your question, sir."

"It is perfectly limpid, nevertheless. I am asking myself how you are going to live, your mother and yourself ?"

"Providence will not abandon us, sir."

M. Costeclar had crossed his legs, and with the end of his cane he was negligently tapping his immaculately shining boot. "Providence !" he giggled, "that's very good on the stage, in a play, with low music in the orchestra. I can see it from here. In real life, unfortunately, the life which we both live, you and I, it is not with words, were they a yard long, that the baker, the grocer, and those rascally landlords can be paid, or that dresses and boots can be bought."

She made no answer.

"Now," he continued, "here you are without a penny. Is it Maxence who will supply you with money ? Poor fellow ! Where would he get it ? He has not even enough to supply the wants of his mistress. Therefore, what are you going to do ?"

"I shall work, sir."

He got up, bowed low, and, resuming his seat, said : "My sincere compliments. There is but one obstacle to that fine resolution : it is next to impossible for a woman to earn sufficient to live upon. Servants are about the only ones who ever eat their fill."

"I will be a servant, if necessary."

For two or three seconds he remained taken aback, but, recovering himself, resumed in an insinuating tone, "How different things would be, if you had not rejected me when I wanted to become your husband ! But

you could not bear the sight of me. And yet, upon my word, I was in love with you, oh, but for good and earnest! You see, I am a judge of women; and I saw very well what a sensation you would create, handsomely dressed and leaning back in a fine carriage in the Bois—"

Stronger than her will, disgust rose to her lips. "Ah, sir!" she cried.

He mistook her meaning. "You regret all that," he continued. "I see it very well. Formerly, eh, you would never have consented to receive me thus, alone with you? All this proves that girls should not be head-strong, my dear child."

He, Costeclar, dared to called her, "My dear child." "Oh!" she exclaimed indignantly.

Without heeding her, he went on: "Well, such as I was, I am still. To be sure, it might no longer be a question of marriage between us; but, frankly, what would that matter to you, if the conditions were the same, and if you had, nevertheless, a furnished house, carriages, horses, servants—"

Up to this moment, she had not fully understood him. Drawing herself up to her full height, and pointing to the door, she cried: "Leave the room instantly!"

But he seemed in no wise disposed to do so: on the contrary, paler than usual, his eyes bloodshot, his lips trembling, and smiling a strange smile, he advanced towards Mademoiselle Gilberte. "What!" said he. "You are in trouble. I kindly come to offer my services, and this is how you receive me! You prefer to work, do you? Very well then my lovely one, prick your pretty fingers, and tire your eyes. My time will come: Fatigue and want, the winter cold, hunger in all seasons, will speak to your little heart of that kind Costeclar who adores you, like a big fool that he is, who is a man of business, and who has money plenty of money."

"Wretch!" cried the girl beside herself; "leave me, leave the room at once!"

"One moment," said a strong voice.

M. Costeclar looked round. Marius de Trégars stood at the open door.

"Marius!" murmured Gilberte, rooted to the spot by a surprise hardly less immense than her joy. To behold him thus suddenly, when she was wondering whether she would ever look upon him again, to see him appear at the very moment when she found herself exposed to the grossest insults, was one of those fortunate occurrences which one can scarcely realize; and from the depths of her soul rose something like a hymn of thanks. Nevertheless, she was confounded at M. Costeclar's attitude. According to her idea, and from what she thought she knew, he should have been petrified at the sight of M. de Trégars. But he did not even seem to know him. He appeared shocked, annoyed at being interrupted, slightly surprised, but in no wise moved or frightened.

Knitting his brows, he inquired in his most impertinent tone: "What do you wish?"

M. de Trégars stepped forward. He was somewhat pale, but unnaturally calm, cool, and collected. Bowing to Mademoiselle Gilberte, he said gently: "If I have thus ventured to appear before you, mademoiselle, it is because, as I was passing the house, I thought I recognized this gentleman's carriage." And he pointed over his shoulder to M. Costeclar. "Now," he continued, "I had reason to be somewhat astonished at this, after the positive orders I had given him never to set his feet, not only in this house, but in this part of the city. I wished to find out exactly what it meant, I came up, I heard—"

All this was said in a tone of such crushing contempt, that a slap on the face would have been less cruel. All the blood in M. Costeclar's veins seemed to rush to his face. "You!" he interrupted insolently; "I do not know you."

Perfectly imperturbable, M. de Trégars was drawing off his gloves. "Are you quite sure of that?" he asked. "Come, you certainly know my old friend, M. de Villegre?"

An evident feeling of anxiety appeared on M. Costeclar's countenance. "I do," he stammered.

"Did not M. de Villegre call upon you before the war?"

"He did."

"Well, it was I who sent him to you; and the commands which he delivered to you were mine."

"Yours?"

"Yes, mine. I am Marius de Trégars."

A nervous shudder shook M. Costeclar's lean frame. Instinctively his eye turned towards the door,

"You see," Marius went on in the same quiet tone, "you and I are old acquaintances. For you quite remember me now, don't you? I am the son of that poor Marquis de Trégars who came to Paris, all the way from Brittany, with his whole fortune, more than two millions."

"I remember," said the stock-broker, "I remember perfectly well!"

"On the advice of certain clever people, the Marquis de Trégars ventured into business. Poor old man! He was not very sharp! He was firmly persuaded that he had already more than doubled his capital, when his honourable partners demonstrated to him that he was ruined, and besides that compromised by certain signatures imprudently given."

Gilberte was listening, with her mouth wide open, and wondering what Marius was aiming at, and how he could remain so calm.

"That disaster," he continued, "was at the time the subject of an enormous number of very witty jokes. The frequenters of the Bourse could hardly admire enough those bold financiers who had so deftly relieved that candid marquis of his money. It served him right, why did he meddle in such things? As to myself, to stop the prosecutions with which my father was threatened, I gave up all I had. I was quite young, and, as you see, quite what you call 'green.' I am no longer so now. Were such a thing to happen to me to-day, I should want to know at once what had become of the millions; I would feel all the pockets around me; I would cry: 'Stop thief!'"

At every word, as it were, M. Costeclar's uneasiness became more manifest. "It was not I," he said, "who benefited by M. de Trégars's fortune."

Marius nodded. "I know now," he replied, "among whom the spoils were divided. You, M. Costeclar, you took what you could get, timidly, and according to your means. Sharks are always accompanied by small fishes, to which they abandon the crumbs they disdain. You were but a small fish then: you accommodated yourself with what your patrons, the sharks, did not care about. But, when you tried to operate alone, you were not shrewd enough, you left proofs of your excessive appetite for other people's money. Those proofs I have in my possession."

M. Costeclar was now undergoing perfect torture. "I am powerless," he said, "I know it; I told M. de Villegre so."

"Why are you here, then?"

"How did I know that the count had been sent by you?"

"That's a poor reason, sir."

"Besides, after what has occurred, after Favoral's flight, I thought myself relieved of my engagement."

"Indeed!"

"Well," if you insist upon it, I was wrong, I suppose."

"Not only were you wrong," said Marius still perfectly cool, "but you have committed a great imprudence. By failing to keep your promises, you have relieved me of mine. The pact is broken. According to the agreement, I have the right, on leaving here, to go straight to the police."

M. Costeclar's dull eye vacillated. "I did not think I was doing wrong," he stammered. "Favoral was my friend—"

"And that is why you came to propose to Mademoiselle Favoral to become your mistress? You thought to yourself: 'She is without resources, literally without bread, without friends to protect her: now is the time to come forward.' And thinking you could be cowardly, vile, and base with impunity, you came."

To be thus treated, he, the successful man, in presence of this young girl, whom, a moment before, he was crushing with his impudent opulence, no, M. Costeclar could not stand it. Forgetting all prudence he exclaimed: "You should have let me know, then, that she was your mistress!"

Something like a flame passed over M. de Trégars's face. His eyes flashed. Rising in all the height of his wrath, which broke out terrible at last, "Ah, you scoundrel!" he cried.

M. Costeclar jumped hastily aside. "Sir!"

But at one bound, M. de Trégars had caught him. "On your knees!" he shouted. And, seizing him by the collar with an iron grip, he lifted him clear off the floor, and then threw him down violently upon both knees. "Speak!" he commanded. "Repeat: 'Mademoiselle—'"

M. Costeclar had expected worse from M. de Trégars's look. A horrible fear had instantly crushed within him all idea of resistance. "Mademoiselle—" he stuttered in a choking voice.

"I am the vilest of wretches—" continued Marius.

M. Costeclar's livid face was oscillating like an inert object. "I am," he repeated, "the vilest of wretches—"

"And I beg you—"

But Gilberte was sick of the sight. "Enough," she interrupted, "enough!" Feeling no longer M. de Trégars's heavy hand upon his shoulders, the stock-broker rose with difficulty to his feet. So livid was his face, that one might have thought that all his blood had turned to gall. Dusting the knees of his trousers with the end of his glove, and restoring as best he could the harmony of his dress, which had been seriously disturbed, he muttered between his teeth: "Is it showing any courage to take advantage of one's physical strength?"

M. de Trégars had already recovered his self-possession, and Gilberte thought she could read upon his face regret for his violence. "Would it have been better to have made use of you know what?"

M. Costeclar clasped his hands. "You would not do that," he cried. "What good would it do you to ruin me?"

"None," answered M. de Trégars: "you are right. But yourself—?" And, looking straight into M. Costeclar's eyes, "If you could be of service to me," he inquired, "would you be willing?"

"Perhaps, to recover possession of the papers you have."

M. de Trégars reflected. "After what has just taken place," he said at last, "an explanation is necessary between us. I will be at your house in an hour. Wait there for me."

M. Costeclar had become more pliable than his own lavender kid gloves; in fact, alarmingly pliable. "I am at your command, sir," he replied to M. de Trégars. And, bowing to the ground before Mademoiselle Gilberte, he left the drawing-room. A few minutes after, his carriage drove off.

"Ah, what a wretch!" exclaimed the young girl, dreadfully agitated. "Marius, did you see what a look he gave us as he went out?"

"I saw it," replied M. de Trégars.

"That man hates us. He will not hesitate to commit a crime to avenge the atrocious humiliation you have just inflicted upon him."

"I believe you."

Mademoiselle Gilberte made a gesture of distress. "Why did you treat him so harshly?" she murmured.

"I had intended to keep calm, and it would have been politic to have done so. But there are some insults which a man of heart cannot endure. I do not regret what I have done."

A long pause followed, and they remained standing, facing each other, somewhat embarrassed. Gilberte felt ashamed of the disorder of her dress. M. de Trégars wondered how he could have been bold enough to enter the house as he did.

"You have heard of our misfortune?" said the young girl at last.

"I saw it this morning in the papers."

"What! the papers know already?"

"Everything."

"And our name is printed in them?"

"Yes."

She covered her face with her hands. "What disgrace!" she exclaimed, "At first," said M. de Trégars, "I could not believe it. I hastened to come; and the first tradesman I questioned confirmed only too fully what I had read in the papers. From that moment, I had but one wish—to speak to you. When I reached the door, I noticed M. Costeclar's equipage, and I had a presentiment of the truth. I saw the concierge, and asked to see your mother or your brother, and heard that Maxence had gone out a few moments before, and that Madame Favoral had just left in a cab with M. Chapelain. At the idea that you were alone with M. Costeclar, I could not hesitate. I ran up the stairs, and, finding the door open, had no occasion to ring."

Gilberte could hardly repress the sobs that rose in her throat. "I never hoped to see you again," she stammered, "and you will find there on the table the letter I had just commenced for you when M. Costeclar interrupted me."

M. de Trégars took it up quickly. Two lines only were written. He read: "I release you from your engagement, Marius, henceforth you are free."

He became as white as a sheet. "You wish to release me from my engagement," he exclaimed.

"Is it not my duty? Ah! if it had only been a question of our fortune, I should perhaps have rejoiced to lose it. I know your heart. Poverty would have brought us nearer together. But it is honour, Marius, honour that is lost! The name I bear is forever stained. Whether my father is caught, or whether he escapes, he will be tried all the same, con-

demned, and sentenced to a degrading penalty for embezzlement and forgery."

If M. de Trégars allowed her to proceed thus, it was because he felt all his thoughts whirling in his brain; because she looked so beautiful, all in tears, and her hair dishevelled; because there arose from her person so subtle a charm, that words failed him to express the sensations that agitated him.

"Can you," she continued, "take for your wife the daughter of a dishonoured man? No, you cannot. Forgive me, then, for having for a moment turned away your life from its object; forgive the sorrow I have caused you; leave me to the misery of my fate; forget me!" She was suffocating.

"Ah, you have never loved me!" exclaimed Marius.

"O heavens!" she cried.

"Would it be easy for you to forget me then? Were I to be struck by misfortune, would you break our engagement, cease to love me?"

She took his hands, and, pressed them between hers. "To cease loving you no longer depends on my will," she murmured with quivering lips. "Poor, abandoned of all, disgraced, criminal even, I should love you still and always."

Marius threw his arms around her waist, and, drawing her to his breast, covered her fair hair with burning kisses. "Well, it is thus that I love you!" he exclaimed, "and with all my soul, exclusively, and for life! What do I care for your relations? Do I know them? Your father, does he even exist? Your name is mine, the spotless name of Trégars. You are my wife! you are mine, mine!"

She was struggling feebly, an almost invincible torpor was creeping over her. She felt her reason was going, her energy giving way, her eyes became clouded, and a want of air oppressed her heaving chest. A great effort of her will restored her to consciousness. She disengaged herself gently from the arms of her lover, and sank upon a chair, less strong against joy than she had been against sorrow. "Forgive me," she stammered, "forgive me for having doubted you!"

M. de Trégars was not much less agitated than Gilberte; but he was a man, and the springs of his energy were of a superior temper. In less than a minute he had fully recovered his self-possession, and imposed upon his features their accustomed expression. Drawing a chair by the side of Mademoiselle Gilberte, he said: "Permit me, my friend, to remind you that our moments are numbered, and that there are many details which it is urgent that I should know."

"What details?" she asked, raising her head.

"About your father."

She looked at him with an air of profound surprise. "Do you not know more about it than I do?" she replied, "more than my mother more than any of us? Is it not you who, whilst following up the people who robbed your father, have stricken mine unwittingly? And it is I, miserable girl that I am, who inspired you with that fatal resolution; and I have not the heart to regret it."

M. de Trégars had blushed imperceptibly. "How did you know?" he began.

"Was it not said that you were about to marry Mademoiselle de Thaller?"

"Never," he exclaimed, "has the idea of this marriage existed, except in the brain of M. de Thaller, and, more still, of the Baroness de Thaller. It

occurred to her because she likes my name, and would be delighted to see her daughter Marchioness de Trégars. She has never breathed a word of it to me; but she has spoken of it everywhere, with just enough secrecy to make it a good piece of gossip. She went so far as to confide to several persons of my acquaintance the amount of the dowry, thinking thus to encourage me. As far as I could, I warned you against this false news through the intermedium of Signor Gismondo."

"Signor Gismondo relieved me of cruel anxieties," she replied; "but I suspected the truth from the first. Was I not the confidante of your hopes? Did I not know your projects? I had taken for granted that all this talk about a marriage was but a means to advance yourself in M. de Thaller's intimacy without awakening his suspicions."

M. de Trégars was not the man to deny the truth. "Perhaps, indeed I, have not been wholly foreign to M. Favoral's disaster," he said. "At least I may have hastened it a few months, a few days only, perhaps; for it was inevitable. Nevertheless, had I suspected the real facts, I would have given up my designs, Gilberte, I swear it, rather than risk injuring your father. There is no undoing what is done; but the evil may, perhaps, be somewhat lessened."

Gilberte started. "Great heavens!" she exclaimed, "do you, then, believe my father innocent?"

Better than any one else, Gilberte must have been convinced of her father's guilt. Had she not seen him humiliated and trembling before M. de Thaller? Had she not heard him, as it were, acknowledge the truth of the charge that was brought against him; but at twenty hope never forsakes us, even in presence of facts. And when she understood by M. de Trégars's silence that she was mistaken, she bowed her head and murmured: "It is madness, I feel it but too well; but the heart speaks louder than reason. It is so cruel to be driven to despise one's father!" She wiped away the tears which filled her eyes, and, in a firmer voice, continued: "What happens is so incomprehensible! How can I help imagining one of those mysteries which time alone unravels. For twenty-four hours we have been lost in idle conjectures, but always and fatally, we come to this conclusion—that my father must be the victim of some mysterious intrigue. M. Chapelain, whom a loss of a hundred and sixty thousand francs has not made particularly indulgent, is of that opinion."

"And so am I," exclaimed Marius.

"You see, then—"

But without allowing her to proceed, and gently taking her hand, he resumed: "Let me tell you all, and try with you to find an issue to this horrible situation. Strange rumours are afloat about M. Favoral. It is said that his austerity was but a mask, his sordid economy a means of gaining confidence. It is affirmed that he in fact abandoned himself to all sorts of dissipation; that he had, somewhere in Paris, another home, where he squandered the money of which he was so sparing here. Is it true? The same thing is said of all those in whose hands large fortunes have melted away."

The young girl blushed deeply. "I believe it is true," she replied. "The commissary of police stated so to us. He found among my father's papers receipted bills for a number of costly articles, which could only have been intended for a woman."

M. de Trégars looked perplexed. "And does any one know who this woman is?" he asked.

"No."

"Whoever she may be, I admit that she may have cost M. Favoral considerable sums. But can she have cost him twelve millions?"

"That is precisely the remark which M. Chapelain made."

"And which every sensible man must also make. I know very well that to conceal for years a considerable deficit is a costly operation, requiring purchases and sales, the handling and shifting of funds, all of which is ruinous in the extreme. But, on the other hand, M. Favoral was making money, a great deal of money. He was rich: he was supposed to be worth millions. Had it been otherwise, Costeclar would never have asked your hand."

"M. Chapelain says that at a certain time my father had at least fifty thousand francs a year."

"It is incomprehensible."

For two or three minutes M. de Trégars remained silent, reviewing in his mind every imaginable eventuality, and then he resumed: "But no matter. As soon as I heard this morning the amount of the deficit, doubts came to my mind. And it was for that reason, dear friend, that I was so anxious to see you and speak to you. It is necessary for me to know exactly what occurred here last night."

Rapidly, but without omitting a single useful detail, Gilberte narrated the scenes of the previous night, the sudden appearance of M. de Thaller, the arrival of the commissary of police, M. Favoral's escape, thanks to Maxence's presence of mind. Everyone of her father's words had remained fixed in her memory; and it was almost literally that she repeated his strange speeches to his indignant friends, and his incoherent remarks at the moment of flight, when, whilst acknowledging his fault, he said that he was not as guilty as they thought; that, at anyrate, he was not alone guilty, and that he had been shamefully sacrificed.

"That is exactly what I thought," said M. de Trégars, when she had finished speaking.

"What?"

"M. Favoral played a part in one of those terrible financial dramas which ruin a thousand poor dupes to the benefit of two or three clever rascals. Your father wanted to be rich; he needed money to carry on his intrigues. He allowed himself to be tempted. But whilst he believed himself one of the managers, called upon to divide the receipts, he was but a supernumerary with a stated salary. The moment of the denouement having come, his so-called partners disappeared through a trap-door with the cash, leaving him alone to face the audience who want their money back."

"If that is the case," said the young girl, "why didn't my father speak?"

"What could he say?"

"Name his accomplices."

"And suppose he had no proofs of their complicity to offer? He was the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank; and it is from his safe that the millions are missing."

Mademoiselle Gilberte's conjectures had run far ahead of that sentence. Looking Marius straight in the face, she said: "Then you believe the same as M. Chapelain, that M. de Thaller—"

"Ah! M. Chapelain thinks—"

"That the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank must have known of the embezzlements."

"And that he had his share of them?"

"A larger share than his cashier, yes."

A singular smile played on M. de Trégars's lips. "Quite possible," he added, "that's quite possible."

For a few moments Gilberte's embarrassment was quite evident in her look. At last, overcoming her hesitation, she resumed: "Forgive me, but I had imagined that M. de Thaller was one of those men whom you wished to strike; and I had indulged in the hope, that, whilst having justice done to your father, you were thinking, perhaps, of avenging mine."

M. de Trégars jumped up, as if moved by a spring. "Well, yes!" he exclaimed, "you guessed correctly. But how can we obtain this double result? A single mistake at this moment might lose all. Ah, if I only knew your father's real position; if I could only see him and speak to him! In one word he might, perhaps, place in my hands a powerful weapon, the weapon that I have as yet been unable to find."

"Unfortunately," replied Gilberte with a gesture of despair, "we are without news of my father; and he even refused to tell us where he intended to take refuge."

"But he will write, perhaps. Besides, we might look for him, cautiously, so as not to excite the suspicions of the police; and if your brother Maxence was only willing to help me—"

"Alas! I fear that Maxence may have other occupations. He insisted upon going out this morning, in spite of my mother's request to the contrary."

But Marius stopped her, and, in the tone of a man who knows much more than he is willing to tell, he said: "Do not calumniate Maxence; it is through him, perhaps, that we shall receive the help that we need."

"Eleven o'clock struck. Gilberte started. "Dear me!" she exclaimed, my mother will be home directly."

M. de Trégars might as well have waited for her. Henceforth he had nothing to conceal. Yet, after duly deliberating with the young girl, they decided that he should withdraw, and send M. de Villegré to declare his intentions. He then left, and, five minutes later, Madame Favoral and M. Chapelain appeared. The ex-lawyer was furious; and he threw the bundle of bank-notes upon the table with a movement of rage. "In order to return them to M. de Thaller," he exclaimed, "it was at least necessary to see him. But the gentleman is invisible; he keeps himself under lock and key, guarded by a perfect crowd of servants in livery."

Meantime, Madame Favoral had approached her daughter. "Your brother?" she asked in a whisper.

"He has not yet come home."

"Dear me!" sighed the poor mother; "at such a time he abandons us, and for whose sake?"

XXV.

MADAME FAVORAL, usually so indulgent, was too severe this time; and it was very unjustly that she accused her son. She forgot, and what mother does not forget, that he was twenty-five years of age, that he was a man, and that he had his own interests and passions, his affections and his duties. Because he happened to leave the house for a few hours, Maxence was surely not forsaking either his mother or his sister. It was not without a severe internal struggle that he had decided to go out, and as he was going down the stairs, he thought, "Poor mother, I am sure I am making her very unhappy;

but how can I help it?" This was the first time that he had been in the street since his father's disaster had been known; and the impression produced upon him was painful in the extreme. Formerly, when he walked through the Rue St. Gilles, that street where he was born, and where he used to play as a child, everyone met him with a friendly nod or a familiar smile. True, he was then the son of a man rich and highly esteemed; whereas, this morning, not a hand was extended, not a hat raised on his passage. People whispered among themselves, and pointed him out with looks of hatred and irony. That was because he was now the son of the dishonest cashier tracked by the police, of the man whose crime brought disaster upon so many innocent parties.

Mortified and ashamed, Maxence was hurrying on, his head cast down, his cheek burning, his throat parched, when, in front of a wine-shop, a man exclaimed: "Halloo! why, that's the son. Well he has cheek!"

And farther on, in front of the grocer's: "I tell you what," said a woman in the midst of a group, "they still have more than we've got."

Then, for the first time, he understood with what crushing weight his father's crime would weigh upon his whole life; and, whilst going along the Rue de Turenne, he murmured: "It's all over, I shall never get over it."

And he thought of changing his name, of emigrating to America, and hiding himself in the deserts of the Far West, when, a little farther on, he noticed a group of some thirty persons in front of a newspaper-stand. The vendor, a fat little man with a red face and an impudent look, was crying in a hoarse voice: "Here are the morning papers! The latest editions! All the details of the robbery of twelve millions by a poor cashier. Buy the morning papers!"

And, to stimulate the sale of his wares, he added all sorts of jokes of his own invention, saying that the thief belonged to the neighbourhood; that it was quite flattering for such a backward locality as the Marais. The crowd laughed; and he went on: "The cashier Favoral's robbery! twelve millions! Buy the paper, and see how it's done."

And so the scandal was public, and all Paris was talking of it. Maxence was listening a few steps off. He felt inclined to pass on; but an imperative feeling, stronger than his will, made him anxious to see what the papers said. Suddenly he made up his mind, and, going up to the man, he threw down three sous, seized a paper, and hastened away.

"Not very polite, is he?" remarked two idlers whom he had pushed a little roughly.

Quick as he had been, a shopkeeper of the Rue de Turenne had had time to recognize him. "Why, that's the cashier's son!" he exclaimed.

"Is it possible?"

"Why don't they arrest him?"

Half a dozen curious fellows, more eager than the rest, ran after him to try and see his face. But he was already far off. Leaning against a lamp-post on the Boulevard du Temple, he unfolded the paper he had just bought. He had no trouble in finding the article. In the middle of the first page, in the most prominent position, he read in large letters—

"ANOTHER FINANCIAL DISASTER!"

"At the moment of going to press, the greatest agitation prevails among the stock-brokers and operators of the little Bourse generally, owing to the

news that one of our great banking establishments has just been the victim of a theft of unusual magnitude. At about five o'clock in the afternoon, the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank, having need of some documents, went to look for them in the office of the head cashier, who was then absent. A memorandum forgotten on the table excited his suspicions. Sending at once for a locksmith, he had all the drawers opened, and soon acquired the irrefutable evidence that the Mutual Credit Bank had been defrauded of sums, which, as far as now known, amount to upwards of twelve millions. The police was at once notified; and towards seven o'clock M. Brosse, commissary of police, duly provided with a warrant, called at the guilty cashier's house. The cashier, whose name is Favoral, had just sat down to dinner with some friends. Warned, no one knows how, he succeeded in escaping through a window into the court-yard of the adjoining house, and up to this hour has eluded all search. It seems that his embezzlements had been going on for years, but had been skilfully concealed by false entries. M. Favoral had managed to secure the esteem of all who knew him. At home he led a more than modest existence. But that was only, as it were, his official life. Elsewhere, and under another name, he indulged in the most reckless expenses for the sake of a woman with whom he was madly in love. Her name is not yet known to the public. Some mention a very fascinating young actress, who performs at a theatre not a hundred miles from the Passage des Panoramas; others, a lady belonging to the financial high-life, whose equipages, diamonds, and dresses are justly famed. We might easily, in this respect, give particulars which would astonish many people, for *we know all*; but, at the risk of seeming less well-informed than some others of our morning contemporaries, we will observe a silence which our readers will surely appreciate. We do not wish to add, by a premature indiscretion, anything to the grief of a family already so cruelly stricken; for M. Favoral leaves behind him in the deepest sorrow a wife and two children—a son of twenty-five, employed in a railway office, and a daughter of twenty, remarkably handsome, who, a few months ago, was on the point of marrying M. C—.”

Tears of rage obscured Maxence's sight whilst reading the last few lines of this terrible article. To find himself thus held up to public curiosity, though innocent, was more than he could bear. And yet he was, perhaps, still more surprised than indignant. He had just learned in that paper more than his father's most intimate friends knew, more than he knew himself. Where had it obtained its information? And what could be those other details which the writer pretended to know, but did not wish to publish as yet? Maxence felt like running to the office of the paper, fancying that someone there could tell him exactly where and under what name M. Favoral led that existence of pleasure and luxury, and who the woman was to whom the article alluded. But in the meantime he had reached his hotel—the Hôtel des Folies. After a moment of hesitation, “Bah,” he thought, “I have the whole day before me to call at the office of the paper.”

And he entered the corridor of the hotel, a corridor that was so long, so dark, and so narrow, that it gave an idea of the shaft of a mine, and that it was prudent, before entering it, to make sure that no one was coming in the opposite direction. The hotel took its name from the neighbouring Théâtre des Folies-Nouvelles, now the Théâtre Déjazet. It consisted of the rear building of a large old house, and had no frontage on the Boulevard, where nothing betrayed its existence, except a large lamp hung over a low

and narrow door, situated between a café and a confectioner's shop. It was one of those hotels, of which there are a good many in Paris, somewhat mysterious and suspicious, ill-kept, and the profits of which remain a mystery for simple-minded folks. Who occupy the rooms of the first and second floors? No one knows. Never have the most curious of the neighbours seen the face of a tenant. And yet they are occupied; for often, in the afternoon, a curtain is drawn aside, and a shadow is seen to pass the window. In the evening, lights are noticed within; and sometimes the sound of an old cracked piano is heard.

Above the second floor, the mystery ceases. All the upper rooms, the prices of which are relatively modest, are occupied by tenants who may be seen and heard. Clerks like Maxence, shop-girls from the neighbourhood, a few restaurant-waiters, and sometimes some poor devil of an actor or chorus-singer from the Théâtre Déjazet, the Cirque d'Hiver, or the Théâtre du Château d'Eau. One of the great advantages of the Hôtel des Folies, and Madame Fortin, the landlady, never failed to point it out to the new tenants, an inestimable advantage, she declared, was a back-entrance on the Rue Béranget. "And everybody knows," she concluded, "that there is no chance of being caught, when one has the good luck to live in a house that has two entrances."

When Maxence passed the landlady's room, a small, dark, and dirty apartment, M. and Madame Fortin were just finishing their breakfast with an immense bowl of coffee of doubtful colour, of which an enormous red cat was taking a share.

"Ah, here is M. Favoral!" they exclaimed.

There was no mistaking their tone. They knew what had happened; and the newspaper lying on the table showed how they had learnt it.

"Some one called to see you last night," said Madame Fortin, a big fat woman, whose nose was always besmeared with snuff, and whose honeyed voice made a marked contrast with her bird-of-prey look.

"Who?"

"A gentleman of about fifty, tall and thin, with a long overcoat, coming down to his heels."

Maxence started. He imagined, from this description, that it was his father. And yet it seemed impossible, after what had happened, that he should dare to show himself on the Boulevard du Temple, where everybody knew him, within a step of the Café Turc, of which he was one of the oldest customers.

"At what o'clock was he here?" he inquired.

"I really can't tell," answered the landlady. "I was half asleep at the time; but Fortin can tell us."

M. Fortin, who looked about twenty years younger than his wife, was one of those small, fair men, with scanty beard, a suspicious glance, and uneasy smile, such as women like Madame Fortin know how to find.

"The confectioner had just put up his shutters," he replied, "consequently, it must have been about a quarter past eleven."

"And what did he say?" asked Maxence.

"Nothing, except that he was very sorry not to find you in. And, in fact, he did look quite annoyed. We asked him to leave his name; but he said it wasn't worth while, and that he would call again."

At the glance which the landlady gave him from the corner of her eyes, Maxence understood that she entertained the same suspicion as himself respecting his visitor. And, as if she had wished to make it more apparent

still, she said in her most innocent way : "I ought, perhaps, to have given him your key."

"And why so, pray?"

"Oh ! I don't know, an idea of mine, that's all. Besides, Mademoiselle Lucienne can probably tell you more about it ; for she was there when the gentleman came, and I even think that they exchanged a few words in the court-yard."

Maxence, seeing that they were only seeking a pretext to question him, took his key, and inquired : "Is Mademoiselle Lucienne at home?"

"Can't tell. She has been going and coming all the morning, and I don't know whether she finally stayed in or out. One thing is sure, she waited for you last night until past twelve ; and she didn't like it much I can tell you."

Maxence started up the steep stairs ; and, as he reached the upper floors, a woman's voice, fresh and beautifully toned, reached his ears more and more distinctly. She was singing a popular tune, one of those songs which are monthly put in circulation by the *cafés-concerts*.

"She is in," murmured Maxence, breathing more freely.

Reaching the fourth floor, he stopped before the door which faced the stairs, and knocked lightly. At once, the voice which had just commenced another verse stopped short, and inquired, "Who's there?"

"I, Maxence !"

"At this hour !" replied the voice with an ironical laugh. "That's lucky. You probably forgot that we were to have gone to the theatre last night, and started for St. Germain at seven o'clock this morning."

"You do not know then ?" Maxence began, as soon as he could put in a word.

"I know that you did not come home all night."

"That's true. But when I have told you—"

"What ? the lie you have imagined ? Save yourself the trouble."

"Lucienne, I beg of you, open the door."

"Impossible, I am dressing. Go to your own room and as soon as I am dressed, I will join you." And, to cut short all explanations through the door, she recommenced singing.

XXVI.

It was on the opposite side of the landing that what Madame Fortin pompously called "Maxence's apartment" was situated. It consisted of a sort of ante-chamber about the size of a pocket-handkerchief, decorated by the Fortins with the name of dining-room, a bedroom, and a cupboard styled a dressing-room in the lease. Nothing could be more gloomy than this lodging, in which the ragged paper and soiled paint retained the traces of all the wanderers who had occupied it since the opening of the *Hôtel des Folies*. The dislocated ceiling was scaling off in large pieces ; the floor seemed affected with the dry-rot ; and the doors and windows were so much warped and sprung, that it required an effort to close them. The furniture was on a par with the rest.

"How everything does wear out !" sighed Madame Fortin. "It isn't ten years since I bought that furniture."

In point of fact, it was over fifteen, and even then she had bought it second-hand, and almost unfit for use. The curtain^s retained but a vague

shade of their original colour. The veneer was almost entirely off the bedstead. Not a single lock was in order, whether in the writing-table or the chest of drawers. The rug had become a nameless rag; and the broken springs of the sofa, cutting through the threadbare stuff with which it was covered, stood up threateningly like knife-blades. The most sumptuous object was an enormous China stove, which occupied almost one-half of the ante-chamber dining-room. It could not be used to make a fire for it had no pipe. Nevertheless, Madame Fortin refused obstinately to remove it, under the pretext that it gave such a comfortable appearance to the apartment. All this elegance cost Maxence forty-five francs a month, and five francs for attendance; the whole payable in advance between the 1st and 3rd of the month. If, on the 4th, a tenant came in without money, Madame Fortin squarely refused to give him his key, and invited him to seek shelter elsewhere.

"I have been caught too often," she replied to those who tried to obtain twenty-four hours' grace from her. "I wouldn't trust my own father till he 5th, he who was a superior officer in Napoleon's armies, and the very soul of honour."

It was chance alone which had brought Maxence, after the Commune, to the Hôtel des Folies; and he had not been there a week, before he had fully made up his mind not to wear out Madame Fortin's furniture very long. He had even already found another and more suitable lodging, when, about a year previously, a certain meeting on the stairs had modified all his views, and lent a charm to his apartment, which he had not hitherto suspected. As he was going out one morning to his office, he met on the landing a rather tall and very dark young girl, who had just come running up the stairs. She passed before him like a flash, opened the opposite door, and disappeared. But, rapid as the apparition had been, it had left in Maxence's mind one of those impressions which are never obliterated. He could not think of anything else during the whole day; and after business hours, instead of going to dine in the Rue St. Gilles, as usual, he sent a note to his mother to tell her not to wait for him, and bravely went home. But it was in vain that, during the whole evening, he kept watch behind his door, left slyly ajar; he did not get a glimpse of his fair neighbour. Neither did she show herself on the next or the three following days; and Maxence was beginning to despair, when at last, on the Sunday, as he was going down stairs, he met her again face to face. He had thought her quite pretty at the first glance; this time he was dazzled to that extent, that he remained for over a minute, standing like a statue against the wall. And certainly it was not her clothes that helped to set off her beauty. She wore a poor dress of black merino, a narrow collar, and plain cuffs, and a bonnet of the utmost simplicity. She had nevertheless an air of incomparable dignity, a grace that charmed and yet inspired respect, and the carriage of a queen. This was on the 30th of July. As Maxence was handing in his key before going out, he said to Madame Fortin: "My apartment suits me well enough; I shall keep it. And here are fifty francs for the month of August."

And, while the landlady was making out a receipt, "You never told me," he began with his most indifferent look, "that I had a neighbour."

Madame Fortin straightened herself up like an old war-horse at the sound of the bugle. "Yes, yes!" she said, "Mademoiselle Lucienne."

"Lucienne," repeated Maxence: "that's a pretty name."

"Have you seen her?"

"I have just seen her. She's rather good looking."

The worthy landlady jumped on her chair. "Rather good looking!" she repeated. "You must be hard to please, my dear sir; for I, who am a judge, I affirm that you might search Paris all over for four whole days without finding such a handsome girl. Rather good looking! A wench who has hair that comes down to her knees, a dazzling complexion, great big eyes, and teeth whiter than that cat's. Believe me, my friend, you'll wear out more than one pair of boots running after women before you catch one like her."

That was exactly Maxence's opinion; and yet with his coldest look he asked: "Has she long been your tenant, dear Madame Fortin?"

"A little over a year. She was here during the siege; and just then, as she could not pay her rent, I was, of course, going to turn her out; but she went straight to the commissary of police, who came here, and forbade me to turn out either her or anybody else. As if people were not masters in their own house!"

"That was perfectly absurd!" objected Maxence, who was determined to gain the landlady's good graces.

"Never heard of such a thing!" she went on. "Compel you to lodge people free! Why not feed them too! In short, she remained so long, that, after the Commune, she owed me a hundred and eighty francs. Then she said, that, if I would let her stay, she would pay me each month the rent in advance, besides ten francs on the old account. I agreed, and she has already paid off twenty francs."

"Poor girl!" murmured Maxence.

But Madame Fortin shrugged her shoulders. "Really," she replied, "I don't pity her much; for, if she only chose in forty-eight hours I should be paid, and she would have something else on her back instead of that old black rag. But she has a will of her own. She hasn't a sou and yet she won't listen to reason. What a pity. I am killing myself by constantly telling her: 'In these days, my child, there is but one reliable friend, who is better than all others, and who must be taken as he comes, without making any faces if he is a little dirty: I mean money. One always gets on well when one has money, and nobody will want to know where it comes from. That is why a woman who possesses charms and does not make use of them is a fool. Beauty soon fades. Look at me.' But all my preaching goes for nothing. I might as well sing."

Maxence was listening with intense delight. "In short, what does she do?" he asked.

"That's more than I know," replied Madame Fortin. "The young lady has not much to say. All I know is, that she leaves every morning bright and early, and rarely gets home before eleven. On Sunday she stays at home, reading; and sometimes, in the evening, she goes out, always alone, to some theatre or ball. Ah! she is an odd one, I can tell you!"

A lodger who came in interrupted the landlady; and Maxence walked off, dreaming how he could manage to make the acquaintance of his pretty and eccentric neighbour. Because he had once spent some hundreds of napoleons in the company of young ladies with yellow chignons, he fancied himself a man of experience, and had but little faith in the virtue of a girl of twenty, living alone in a hotel, and left sole mistress of her own fancy. He began to watch for every opportunity of meeting her; and, towards the end of the month, he had got so far as to bow to her, and to enquire after her health. But, the first time he ventured to make love to her, she looked at him from

head to foot with so cold a glance, and turned her back upon him with so much contempt, that he remained standing with his mouth wide open. "I am losing my time like a fool," he thought.

Great, then, was his surprise, when the following week, on a fine afternoon, he saw Mademoiselle Lucienne leave her room, no longer clad in her eternal black dress, but wearing a brilliant and extremely rich costume. With a beating heart he followed her. In front of the Hôtel des Folies stood a handsome carriage and horses. As soon as Mademoiselle Lucienne appeared, a footman respectfully opened the carriage door. She got in ; and the horses started at a full trot. Maxence watched the carriage disappear in the distance, like a child who sees the bird upon which he hoped to lay hands fly away. "Gone !" he muttered, "gone !"

But when he turned round he found himself face to face with the Fortins, man and wife, who were laughing in a sinister manner. "What did I tell you ?" exclaimed Madame Fortin. "There she is, started at last. Whip up, coachman ! She'll go far, the child."

The magnificent equipage and elegant dress had produced quite an effect among the neighbours. The customers sitting in front of the café were laughing among themselves. The confectioner and his wife were casting indignant glances at the proprietors of the Hôtel des Folies.

"You see, M. Favoral," resumed Madame Fortin, "such a handsome girl as that was not made for our neighbourhood. You must make up your mind to it ; you won't see much more of her on the Boulevard du Temple."

Without saying a word, Maxence returned to his room, hot tears filling his eyes. He felt ashamed of his weakness ; for, after all, what was this girl to him ? "She is gone !" he repeated to himself. "Well, so much the better !" But, despite all his efforts at philosophy, he felt an immense sadness invading his heart ; ill-defined regrets and spasms of anger agitated him. He was thinking what a fool he had been to believe in the grand airs of the young lady, and that, if he had had dresses and horses to give her, she might not have received him so harshly. At last he made up his mind to think no more of her—one of those fine resolutions which are always taken, and never kept ; and in the evening he left his room to go and dine in the Rue St. Gilles.

But, as was often his custom, he stopped at the café next door, and called for a drink. He was mixing his absinthe when he saw the carriage that had carried off Mademoiselle Lucienne return at a rapid gait, and stop short in front of the hotel. Mademoiselle Lucienne got out slowly, crossed the side-walk, and entered the narrow passage. Almost immediately the carriage drove off. "What does it mean ?" thought Maxence, who was actually forgetting to drink his absinthe. He was losing himself in absurd conjectures, when, some fifteen minutes later, he saw the young girl come out again. She had taken off her elegant clothes, and resumed her cheap black dress. She had a basket on her arm, and was going towards the Rue Charlot. Without further reflections, Maxence rose immediately, and started to follow her, being very careful that she should not see him. After walking for five or six minutes, she entered a shop, half eating-house and half wine-shop, in the window of which was a large card bearing the words : "*Ordinary at all hours at forty centimes. Hard-boiled eggs, and salad of the season.*" Maxence, having crept up as close as he could, saw Mademoiselle Lucienne take a tin box out of her basket, and have what was called an "ordinary" poured into it ; that is, half a pint of soup, a piece of beef as large as the fist, and a few vegetables. She then had a small bottle half

filled with wine, paid, and walked out with that same dignified air which she always wore.

"Funny dinner," murmured Maxence, "for a woman who was reclining just now in a handsome carriage."

From that moment she became the sole and only object of his thoughts. A passion which he no longer attempted to resist, was penetrating like a subtle poison to the innermost depths of his being. He thought himself happy, when, after watching for hours, he caught a glimpse of this singular creature, who, after that extraordinary expedition, seemed to have resumed her usual mode of life. Madame Fortin was amazed. "She has been too exacting," she said to Maxence, "and the thing has fallen through." He made no answer. He was horrified with the honourable landlady's insinuations; and yet he never ceased to repeat to himself that he must be a great simpleton to have faith for a moment in the young lady's virtue. What would he not have given to be able to question her? But he dared not. Often he would gather up his courage, and wait for her on the stairs; but, as soon as she fixed her great black eyes upon him, all the phrases he had prepared took flight, his tongue clove to his mouth, and he could barely succeed in stammering out a timid: "Good morning, mademoiselle."

He felt so angry with himself, that he was almost on the point of leaving the Hôtel des Folies, when one evening Madame Fortin said to him: "Well, all is made up again, it seems. The beautiful carriage called for her to-day."

Maxence could have beaten the old woman. "What good would it do you," he asked, "if Lucienne were to go to the bad?"

"It's always a pleasure," she grumbled, "to have one more woman to torment the men. It's those girls who avenge us poor honest women!"

The sequel seemed at first to justify her worst previsions. Three times during that week, Mademoiselle Lucienne drove out in grand style; but as she always returned, and always resumed her eternal black woollen dress, "I can't make head or tail of it," Maxence said to himself. "But, never mind, I'll clear the matter up yet."

He applied for and obtained leave of absence from his office; and on the very next day he took up a position behind the window of the adjoining café. On the first day he lost his time; but on the second day, at about three o'clock, the famous equipage made its appearance; and, a few moments later, Mademoiselle Lucienne seated herself in it. Her costume was even richer, and more showy than the first time. Maxence at once hastened after her and hailed a cab. "You see that carriage," he said to the coachman. "Wherever it goes, you must follow it. I will give you ten francs for yourself."

"All right," replied the driver, whipping up his horse.

Mademoiselle Lucienne's carriage started at full trot down the Boulevards to the Madeleine, then along the Rue Royale, and through the Place de la Concorde, to the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, where the horses were brought to a walk. It was the end of September, and one of those lovely autumnal days which are a last smile of the blue sky and the last caress of the sun. There were races in the Bois de Boulogne; and the equipages were five and six abreast on the avenue. The side-walks were crowded with idlers. From the inside of his cab, Maxence never lost sight of Mademoiselle Lucienne. She was evidently creating a sensation. The men stopped to look at her with gaping admiration; the women leaned out of their carriages to see her better. "Where can she be going?" Maxence wondered. She was

going to the Bois ; and soon her carriage joined the interminable line of equipages which were following the grand drive at a walk. It became easier now to follow on foot. Maxence told the cabman to wait for him at a particular spot and took the path that winds round the lakes. He had not gone fifty steps, however, before he heard some one call him. He turned round and saw close by M. Saint-Pavin and M. Costeclar. Maxence hardly knew M. Saint-Pavin, whom he had only seen two or three times in the Rue St. Gilles, and execrated M. Costeclar. Yet he advanced towards them. Mademoiselle Lucienne's carriage was now following the others, and he was sure of rejoining it whenever he thought proper.

"It is a miracle to see you here, my dear Maxence !" exclaimed M. Costeclar, loud enough to attract the attention of several passers-by. To occupy the attention of others, anyhow and at any cost, was M. Costeclar's leading object in life. That was evident from the style of his dress, the shape of his hat, the bright stripes of his shirt, his ridiculous shirt-collar, his cuffs, his boots, his gloves, his cane, in fact, everything belonging to him. "If you see us on foot," he added, "it is because we wanted to walk a little. The doctor's advice, my dear friend. My carriage is yonder, behind those trees. Do you not recognise my dapple-greys?" And he extended his cane in that direction, as if he were addressing himself, not to Maxence alone, but to every one who was passing.

"All right, all right ! everybody knows you have a carriage," interrupted M. Saint-Pavin.

The editor of the "Financial Pilot" was the living contrast of his companion. More slovenly still than M. Costeclar was careful of his dress, he exhibited cynically a loose cravat rolled over a dirty shirt front, a coat white with dust, muddy boots, though it had not rained for some days, and large red hands surprisingly filthy. He was all the more proud ; and he wore, cocked on one side, a hat that had not known a brush since the day it had left the hatter's.

"That fellow, Costeclar," he went on, "won't believe that there are in France a number of people who live and die without ever having owned either a horse or a brougham ; which is a fact, nevertheless. Those highly respectable fellows who are born with an income of fifty or sixty thousand francs in their baby-clothes are all alike."

The insulting insinuation was evident ; but M. Costeclar was not the man to get angry for such a trifle. "You are in a bad temper to-day, my dear fellow," he said.

The editor of the "Financial Pilot" made a threatening gesture. "Well, yes," he answered, "I am in a bad temper, like a man who for ten years past has been beating the big drum in front of your d—d financial shops, and who has not been able to make his expenses. Yes, for ten years I have shouted myself hoarse for your benefit : 'Walk in, ladies and gentlemen, and, for every franc-piece you deposit with us, we will return you six. Walk in, follow the crowd, step up to the office, now's the time.' They go in. You receive mountains of franc-pieces, you never return anything, neither six francs for one, nor even a centime. The trick is done, the public is sold. You drive your own carriage ; you suspend diamonds to your mistresses' ears ; and I, the organizer of your success, whose puffs open the tightest closed pockets, and draw the old louis out of the stockings, where they have lain for years, I am driven to have my boots half-soled. You grudge me my very existence ; you kick as soon as I ask you to pay for the big drums bursted in your service."

He spoke so loud, that three or four idlers had stopped. Without being very shrewd, Maxence easily understood that he had happened to arrive in the midst of an acrimonious discussion between these two gentlemen. Closely pressed, and desirous of gaining time, M. Costeclar had evidently called to him in the hopes of effecting a diversion. Bowing, therefore, politely, Maxence said : "Excuse me, gentlemen, I fear I have interrupted you."

But M. Costeclar detained him. "I am not going to let you go," he declared : "you must come and take a glass of Madeira with us, down at the Cascade." And, turning to the editor of "The Pilot," "Come, now, shut up," he said : "you shall have what you want."

"Really?"

"You have my word."

"I'd rather have two or three lines in black and white."

"I'll give them to you to-night."

"All right, then ! Forward the big guns ! Look out for next Sunday's number !"

Peace being made, the gentlemen continued their walk in the most friendly manner, M. Costeclar pointing out to Maxence all the celebrities who were passing by in their carriages.

He had just called his attention to Madame and Mademoiselle de Thaller, accompanied by two gigantic footmen, when suddenly rising on tip-toe, he exclaimed : "By jove ! what a handsome woman !"

Without too much affectation, Maxence fell back a step or two. He felt himself blushing to his very ears, and trembled lest his sudden emotion were noticed, and he were questioned ; for it was Mademoiselle Lucienne who thus excited M. Costeclar's noisy enthusiasm. She had already been once round the lake ; and she was continuing her circular drive.

"Really," approved the editor of "The Financial Pilot," "she is somewhat better than the rest of those ladies we have just seen pass by."

M. Costeclar was on the point of pulling out what little hair he had left. "And I don't know her !" he went on. "A lovely woman rides in the Bois, and I don't know who she is ! It is ridiculous and prodigious ! Who can inform us ?"

A little way off stood a group of gentlemen, who had also just left their carriages, and were looking on this interminable procession of equipages and this amazing display of toilettes.

"They are friends of mine," said M. Costeclar : "let us join them."

They did so ; and, after the usual greetings, "Who is that ?" inquired M. Costeclar. "That dark person, whose carriage follows Madame de Thaller's ?"

An old young man, with scanty hair, dyed beard, and a most impudent smile, answered him : "That's just what we are trying to find out. None of us have ever seen her before."

"I must and shall find out," interrupted M. Costeclar. "I have a very intelligent servant—"

Already he was starting in the direction of the spot where his carriage was waiting for him. The old beau stopped him. "Don't bother yourself, my dear friend," he said. "I also have a servant who is no fool ; and he has had my orders for more than fifteen minutes." The others burst out laughing.

"Distanced. Costeclar !" exclaimed M. Saint-Pavin, who, notwithstanding his slovenly dress and cynical manners, seemed perfectly well received.

No one was now paying any attention to Maxence ; and he slipped off without the slightest care as to what M. Costeclar might think. Reaching the spot where he had left his cab, he jumped in.

"Where to now, sir?" inquired the driver.

"We'll wait for that same carriage," answered Maxence ; "and follow it on the return journey."

But he learned nothing further. Mademoiselle Lucienne drove straight to the Boulevard du Temple, and, as before, immediately resumed her eternal black dress ; and Maxence saw her go to the little restaurant for her modest dinner. But he saw something else too. Almost on the heels of the girl, a servant in livery entered the hotel, and only went off after remaining a full quarter of an hour in busy conference with Madame Fortin.

"It is all over," thought the poor fellow. "Lucienne will not be my neighbour much longer." He was mistaken. A month went by without bringing about any change. As in the past, she went out early, came home late, and on Sundays remained alone all day in her room. Once or twice a week, when the weather was fine, the carriage came for her at about three o'clock, and brought her home at night-fall. Maxence had exhausted all conjectures, when one evening, it was the 31st of October, as he was coming in to go to bed, he heard someone talking very loud in the landlady's room. Prompted by an instinctive curiosity, he approached on tip-toe, so as to see and hear everything. The Fortins and Mademoiselle Lucienne were having a great discussion.

"That's all nonsense," shrieked the worthy landlady ; "and I mean to be paid."

Mademoiselle Lucienne was quite calm. "Well," she replied : "don't I pay you? Here are forty francs, thirty in advance for my room, and ten off the old account."

"I don't want your ten francs."

"What do you want, then?"

"All the hundred and fifty francs which you owe me still."

The young girl shrugged her shoulders. "You forget our agreement," she exclaimed.

"Our agreement?"

"Yes. After the Commune, it was understood that I should give you ten francs a month off the old account. So long as I give them to you, you have nothing to complain of."

Crimson with rage, Madame Fortin had risen from her seat. "Formerly," she shrieked, "I thought I had to deal with a poor work-girl a virtuous woman."

Mademoiselle Lucienne took no notice of the insult. "I have not the amount you demand," she said coldly.

"Well, then," vociferated the other "you must go and ask it of those who pay for your carriages and your dresses, you hussy!"

Still perfectly impassible, the young girl, instead of answering, stretched her hand towards her key ; but M. Fortin stopped her arm. "No, no!" he said with a giggle. "People who don't pay their hotel-bills sleep out, my darling."

Maxence, that very morning, had received his month's pay, and he felt as it were, his two hundred francs burning his pockets. Yielding to a sudden inspiration, he threw the door open, "Here is your money, wretches!" he exclaimed, and, throwing down upon the table one hundred and fifty francs, he withdrew at once.

XXVII.

AT that time, Maxence had not spoken to Lucienne for nearly a month. He tried to persuade himself that she despised him because he was poor. He kept watching for her, for he could not help it ; but as much as possible he avoided her. "I shall be miserable," he thought, "the night she does not come home ; and yet it would be the very best thing that could happen for me." Nevertheless, he spent all his time trying to find some explanations for the conduct of this strange girl, who, beneath her woollen dress, had the haughty manners of a great lady. Then he delighted to imagine between her and himself some of those subjects of confidence, some of those facilities, which chance never fails to supply to attentive passion, or some event which would enable him to emerge from his obscurity, and to acquire some rights by virtue of some great service rendered. But never had he ventured to hope for an occasion as propitious as the one he had just seized. And yet, after he had returned to his room, he hardly dared to congratulate himself upon the promptitude of his decision. He knew too well Mademoiselle Lucienne's excessive pride and sensitive nature. "I should not be surprised if she were angry with me for what I've done," he thought. The evening being quite chilly, he had lighted a few sticks ; and, sitting by the fireside, he was waiting, his mind filled with vague hopes. It seemed to him that his neighbour could not help coming to thank him ; and he was listening intently to all the noises of the house, starting at the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and at the slamming of doors. Ten times, at least, he went out on tip-toe to lean out of the window on the landing, to make sure that there was no light in Mademoiselle Lucienne's room. At eleven o'clock she had not yet come home ; and he was deliberating whether he should not start out in quest of information, when there was a knock at the door. "Come in !" he cried, in a voice choking with emotion.

Mademoiselle Lucienne entered. She was somewhat paler than usual, but calm and perfectly self-possessed. Having bowed without the slightest shade of embarrassment, she laid upon the mantle-piece the hundred and fifty francs which Maxence had thrown to the Fortins ; and, in her most natural tone, said : "Here is your money, sir, I am more grateful than I can express for your prompt kindness in lending them to me ; but I did not need them."

Maxence had risen from his seat, and was making every effort to control his feelings. "Still," he began, "after what I heard—"

"Yes," she interrupted, "Madame Fortin and her husband were trying to frighten me. But they were wasting their time. When, after the Commune, I settled with them the manner in which I would discharge my debt towards them, having a just estimate of their worth, I made them write out and sign our agreement. Being in the right, I could resist them, and was resisting them when you threw them those hundred and fifty francs. Having laid hands upon them, they said they meant to keep them. That's what I could not allow. Not being able to recover them by main force, I went at once to the commissary of police. He was luckily at his office. He is an honest man, who already, once before, helped me out of a

scrape. He listened to me kindly, and was moved by my explanations. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, he put on his overcoat, and came with me to see our landlady. After compelling her to return me your money, he signified to her to strictly observe our agreement, under penalty of incurring his utmost severity."

Maxence was wonderstruck. "How could you dare?" he asked.

"Was I not in the right?"

"Oh, a thousand times yes! Still—"

"What? Should my right be less respected because I am but a woman? And because I have no one to protect me, am I outside the law, and condemned in advance to suffer the iniquitous fancies of every scoundrel? No, thank heaven! Henceforth I shall feel easy. People like the Fortins, who live of I know not what shameful traffic, have too much to fear from the police to dare to molest me further." The resentment of the insult could be read in her great black eyes; and a bitter disgust contracted her lips. "Besides," she added, "the commissary had no need of my explanations to understand what abject inspirations the Fortins were following. The wretches had already received the wages of their infamy. In refusing me my key, in casting me out on the street at ten o'clock at night, they hoped to drive me to seek the assistance of the base scoundrel who paid their odious treason. And we know the price which men demand for the slightest service they render to a woman."

Maxence turned pale. The idea flashed upon his mind that it was to him, perhaps, that these last words were addressed. "Ah, I swear to you!" he exclaimed, "it was without afterthought that I tried to help you. You do not even owe me any thanks."

"I do not thank you any the less, though," she said gently, "and from the bottom of my heart—"

"It was so little!"

"The intention alone makes the value of a service, neighbour. And, besides, do not say that a hundred and fifty francs are nothing to you; perhaps you do not earn much more each month."

"I confess it," he said, blushing a little.

"You see, then? No, it was not to you that my words were addressed, but to the man who has paid the Fortins. He was waiting on the Boulevard, the result of the manœuvre, which, he thought, was about to place me at his mercy. He came quickly to me when I went out, and followed me all the way to the office of the commissary of police, as he has followed me everywhere for the past month, with his sickening gallantries and his degrading propositions."

"Ah, if I had known!" exclaimed Maxence, his eyes flashing with anger. "If you had only told me!"

She smiled at his vehemence. "What would you have done?" she asked. "You cannot impart intelligence to a fool, heart to a coward, or delicacy of feeling to a boor."

"I could have chastised the vile insulter."

She made a superb gesture of indifference. "Bah!" she interrupted. "What are insults to me? I am so accustomed to them, that they no longer have any effect upon me. I am eighteen: I have neither family, relatives, friends, nor any one in the world who even knows of my existence; and I live by my labour. Can you not see what must be the humiliations of each day? Since I was eight years old, I have been earning the bread I eat, the dress I wear, and the rent of the den in which I sleep. Can you

understand what I have endured, to what ignominies I have been exposed, what traps have been set for me, and how it has happened to me sometimes to owe my safety to mere physical strength? And yet I do not complain, since through it all I have been able to retain my self-respect, and to remain virtuous in spite of every one." She laughed a laugh that had something wild in it. And as Maxence looked at her with immense surprise, she resumed: "That seems strange to you, doesn't it. A girl of eighteen, without a sou, free as air, very pretty, and yet virtuous in the midst of Paris. Probably you don't believe it, or, if you do, you just wonder 'What on earth does she do it for?' And really you are right; for, after all, who cares, and who thinks any the more of me, if I work sixteen hours a day to remain virtuous? But it's a fancy of my own; and don't imagine for a moment that I am deterred by any scruples, or by timidity or ignorance. No, no! I believe in nothing, I fear nothing; and I know as much as the oldest libertines, the most vicious, and the most depraved. And I don't say that I have not been tempted sometimes, when, coming home from work, I've seen some young girl, coming out of a restaurant, splendidly dressed, on her lover's arm, and getting into her carriage to go to the theatre. There have been moments when I was cold and hungry, and when, not knowing where to sleep, I wandered all night through the streets like a lost dog! There have been hours when I felt sick of all this misery, and when I said to myself, that, since it was my fate to end in the hospital, I might as well make the trip gaily. But what! I should have had to traffic my person, to sell myself!" She shuddered, and in a hoarse voice, added: "I would rather die."

It was difficult to reconcile words such as these with certain circumstances of Mademoiselle Lucienne's existence: her rides round the lake, for instance, in that carriage that came for her two or three times a week; her ever renewed costumes, each time more eccentric and more showy. But Maxence was not thinking of that. What she told him he accepted as absolutely true and indisputable. And he felt penetrated with an almost religious admiration for this young and beautiful girl, possessed of so much vivid energy, who alone, through the hazards, the perils, and the temptations of Paris, had succeeded in protecting and defending herself. "And yet," he said, "without suspecting it, you had a friend near you."

She started, and a pale smile flitted across her lips. She knew well enough what friendship means between a youth of twenty-five and a girl of eighteen. "A friend?" she murmured.

Maxence guessed her thought; and, in all the sincerity of his soul, he repeated: "Yes, a friend, a comrade, a brother." And thinking to touch her, and gain her confidence, he added: "I can understand you, for I, too, have been very unhappy."

But he was singularly mistaken. She looked at him with an astonished air, and slowly said: "You unhappy! you who have a family, relations, a mother who adores you, a sister."

Had he been less excited, Maxence might have wondered how she knew this, and would have concluded that she must feel some interest in him, since she had doubtless taken the trouble of getting information.

"Besides, you are a man," she went on; "and I do not understand how a man can complain. Have you not the freedom, the strength, and the right to undertake and to dare anything? Is not the world open to your activity and to your ambition! Woman submits to her fate: man makes his.

This was upsetting the dearest pretensions of Maxence, who seriously thought that he had exhausted the rigours of adversity. "There are circumstances," he began.

But she shrugged her shoulders gently, and, interrupting him, exclaimed : "Do not insist, or else I shall think that you lack energy. Why do you speak of circumstances? There are none so adverse but that can be overcome. What would you like, then? To be born with a hundred thousand francs a year, and have nothing to do but to live according to your every day whim, idle, satiated, a burden to yourself, useless, or offensive to others? Ah! if I were a man I would dream of another fate. I should like to start from the Foundling Hospital without a name, and by my will, my intelligence, my daring, and my labour, make something and somebody of myself. I would start from nothing and become everything!" With flashing eyes and quivering nostrils, she drew herself up proudly. But almost at once dropping her head, she added: "The misfortune is, that I am but a woman; and you who complain, if you only knew—"

She sat down, and with her elbow on the little table, her head resting upon her hand, she remained lost in meditation, her eyes fixed, as if following through space all the phases of the eighteen years of her life. There is no energy but unbends at some given moment, no will but has its hour of weakness; and, strong and energetic as was Mademoiselle Lucienne, she had been deeply touched by what Maxence had done. Had she, then, at last found upon her path the companion of whom she had often dreamed in the despairing hours of solitude and wretchedness? After a few moments she raised her head, and, looking into Maxence's eyes with a gaze that electrified him, she said in a tone of indifference somewhat forced: "Doubtless, you think me a strange neighbour. Well, as between neighbours, it is well to know each other, before you judge me, listen."

The recommendation was useless. Maxence was listening with all his attention.

"I was brought up," she began, "in a village in the neighbourhood of Paris, at Louveciennes. My mother had put me out to nurse with some honest gardeners, poor and burdened with a large family. After two months, hearing nothing of my mother, they wrote to her: she did not reply. They then went to Paris, and called at the address she had given them. She had just moved out; and no one knew what had become of her. They could no longer, therefore, expect a single sou for the cares they would bestow upon me. They kept me, nevertheless, thinking that one child the more would not make much difference. I know nothing of my parents, therefore, except what I heard through these kind gardeners; and, as I was still quite young when I had the misfortune to lose them, I have but a very vague remembrance of what they told me. I remember very well, however, that according to their statements, my mother was a young work-woman of rare beauty, and that most probably she was not my father's wife. If I was ever told my mother's or my father's name, if I ever knew it, I have quite forgotten it. I myself had no name. My adopted parents called me the Parisian. I was happy, nevertheless, with these kind people, and treated exactly like their own children. In winter they sent me to school; in summer I helped to weed the garden. I drove a sheep or two along the road, or else I went to gather violets and strawberries in the woods. This was the happiest, or rather the only happy time of my life, towards which my thoughts may turn when I feel despair and discouragement getting the better of me. Alas! I was but eight, when, within the

same week, the gardener and his wife were both carried off by the same disease—inflammation of the lungs. On a freezing December morning, in that house upon which the hand of death had just fallen, we found ourselves, six children, the eldest of whom was not eleven, crying with grief, fright, cold, and hunger. Neither the gardener nor his wife had any relatives; and they left nothing but a few wretched pieces of furniture, the sale of which barely sufficed to pay the expenses of their funeral. The two younger children were sent to the Foundling Hospital; the others were taken charge of by the neighbours. It was a laundress of Marly who took me. I was quite tall and strong for my age. She made an apprentice of me. She was not unkind by nature, but she was violent and brutal in the extreme. She compelled me to do an excessive amount of work, and often of a kind above my strength. Fifty times a day I had to go from the river to the house, carrying on my shoulders enormous bundles of wet napkins or sheets, wring them, spread them out, and then run to Rueil to get the soiled clothes from the customers. I did not complain, I was already too proud to complain; but, if I was ordered to do something that seemed to me too unjust, I refused obstinately to obey, and then I was unmercifully beaten. In spite of all, I might, perhaps, have become attached to the woman had she not had the disgusting habit of drinking. Every week regularly, on the day when she took the clothes to Paris (it was on Wednesdays), she came home drunk. And then, according as, with the fumes of the wine, anger or gaiety rose to her brain, there were atrocious scenes or obscene jests. When she was in that condition, she inspired me with horror. And one Wednesday, as I showed my feelings too plainly, she struck me so hard that she broke my arm. I had been with her for twenty months. The injury she had done me sobered her at once. She became frightened, smothered me with caresses, and begged me to say nothing to any one. I promised, and kept my word faithfully. But a physician had to be called in. There had been witnesses who spoke. The story spread along the river as far as Bougival and Rueil. And one morning a corporal of gendarmes called at the house; and I don't exactly know what would have happened if I had not obstinately maintained that I had broken my arm in falling down stairs."

What surprised Maxence most was Mademoiselle Lucienne's simple and natural tone. No emphasis, scarcely an appearance of emotion. One might have thought it was somebody else's life that she was narrating.

Meantime she continued: "Thanks to my obstinate denials the woman was not disturbed. But the truth was known; and her reputation, which was not good before, became altogether bad. I was an object of interest. The very same people who had seen me twenty times staggering painfully under a load of wet clothes, which was terrible, began to pity me prodigiously because I had had an arm broken, which was nothing. At last a number of our customers arranged to remove me from a house in which, they said, I must end by perishing under bad treatment. And after many inquiries, they discovered at last, at La Jonchère, an old Jewess lady, very rich, and a widow without children, who consented to take charge of me. I hesitated at first to accept these offers; but noticing that the laundress, since she had hurt me, had conceived a still greater aversion for me, I made up my mind to leave her. It was on the day when I was introduced to my new mistress that I first discovered I had no name. After examining me at length, turning me round and round, making me walk and sit down, 'Now,' she inquired, 'what is your name?' I stared at her in surprise; for indeed I was then like a savage, not having the slightest notion of the things of life

'My name is the Parisian,' I replied. She burst out laughing, as also another old lady, a friend of hers, who assisted at my presentation ; and I remember that my little pride was quite offended at their hilarity. I thought they were laughing at me. 'That's not a name,' they said at last. 'That's a nickname.' 'I have no other.' They seemed dumbfounded, repeating over and over again that such a thing was unheard-of ; and on the spot they began to choose a name for me. 'Where were you born ?' inquired my new mistress. 'At Louveciennes.' 'Very well,' said the other, 'let us call her Louvecienne.' A long discussion followed, which irritated me so much that I felt like running away ; but ultimately it was agreed that I should be called, not Louvecienne, but Lucienne ; and Lucienne I have remained. There was nothing said about baptism, since my new mistress was a Jewess. She was an excellent woman, although the grief she had felt at the loss of her husband had somewhat deranged her faculties. As soon as it was decided that I was to remain, she desired to inspect my trousseau. I had none to show her, possessing nothing in the world but the rags on my back. As long as I had remained with the laundress, I had finished wearing out her old dresses ; and I had never worn any other under-clothing save that which I chose to borrow from the customers, an economical system adopted by many laundresses. Dismayed at my state of destitution, my new mistress sent for a needlewoman, and at once ordered her to make some clothes for me. Since the death of the poor gardeners, this was the first time that any one showed me any kindness, except to exact some service of me. I was moved to tears ; and in the excess of my gratitude I would gladly have died for that kind old lady. This feeling gave me the courage and the constancy required to bear with her whimsical nature. She had singular manias, disconcerting fancies, ridiculous and often exorbitant exactions. I lent myself to it all as best I could. As she already had two servants, a cook and a chambermaid, I had myself no special duties in the house. I accompanied her when she went out for a drive. I helped to wait on her at table, and to dress her. I picked up her handkerchief when she dropped it ; and above all, I looked after her snuff-box, which she was continually mislaying. She was pleased with my docility, took much interest in me, and that I might read to her she made me learn to read, for I hardly knew my letters. And the old man whom she gave me for a teacher, finding me intelligent, taught me all he knew, I imagine, of French, geography, and history. The chambermaid, on the other hand, was commissioned to teach me to sew, to embroider, and to execute all sorts of fancy-work ; and she took the more interest in her lessons, that little by little she shifted upon me the most tedious part of her work. I should have been happy in that pretty house at La Jonchère if I had only had some society better suited to my age than the old women with whom I was compelled to live, and who scolded me for a loud word or a somewhat abrupt gesture. What would I not have given to have been allowed to play with the young girls whom I saw on Sundays passing in crowds along the road !

"As time went on, my old mistress became more and more attached to me, and endeavoured in every way to give me proofs of her affection. I sat at table with her, instead of waiting on her as at first. She gave me better clothes, so that she could take me out with her and introduce me anywhere. She went about repeating everywhere that she was as fond of me as of a daughter ; that she intended to set me up in life ; and that certainly she would leave a part of her fortune to me. Alas ! She said it too loud, for

my misfortune—so loud, that the news at last reached the ears of some nephews of hers in Paris, who came now and then to La Jonchère. They had never paid much attention to me up to this time. These speeches opened their eyes, they noticed what progress I had made in the heart of their relative, and their cupidity became alarmed. Trembling lest they should lose an inheritance which they considered as theirs, they united against me, determined to put a stop to their aunt's generous intentions by having me sent off. But it was in vain, that, for nearly a year, their hatred exhausted itself in skilful manœuvres. The instinct of preservation stimulating my perspicacity, I penetrated their intentions, and I struggled with all my might. Every day, to make myself more indispensable, I imagined some fresh attention. They only came once a week to La Jonchère; I was there always. I had the advantage. I struggled successfully, and was probably approaching the end of my troubles when my poor old mistress was taken ill. After forty-eight hours she was very low. She was fully conscious, but for that very reason she could appreciate the danger, and the fear of death made her crazy. Her nieces came to sit by her bed-side; and I was expressly forbidden to enter the room. They understood that this was an excellent opportunity to get rid of me for ever. Evidently bribed in advance, the physicians declared to my poor benefactress that the air of La Jonchère was fatal to her, and that her only chance of recovery was to establish herself in Paris. One of her nephews offered to have her taken to his house in a litter. She would soon get well, they said; and she could then go to finish her convalescence in some southern town. Her first word was for me. She did not wish to be separated from me, she protested, and insisted absolutely upon taking me with her. Her nephews represented to her that this was an impossibility; that she must not think of burdening herself with me; that the simplest thing was to leave me at La Jonchère; and that, moreover, they would see that I was well taken care of. The sick woman struggled for a long time, and with an energy of which I would not have thought her capable. But the others were pressing. The physicians kept repeating that they could not answer for anything if she did not follow their advice. She was afraid of death. She yielded, weeping. The very next morning a sort of litter, carried by eight men, stopped in front of the door. My poor mistress was laid upon it; and they carried her off, without even permitting me to kiss her for the last time. Two hours later the cook and the chambermaid were dismissed. As to myself, the nephew who had promised to look after me, put a twenty-franc-piece in my hand, saying: 'Here is a week's money in advance. Pack up your things immediately, and clear out!'

It was impossible that Mademoiselle Lucienne should not be deeply moved whilst thus stirring the ashes of her past. She showed no sign of it, however, beyond now and then a slight alteration in her voice. As to Maxence, he would vainly have tried to conceal the passionate interest with which he was listening to these unexpected confidences. "Have you, then, never seen your benefactress again?" he asked.

"Never," replied the young girl. "All my efforts to reach her have proved fruitless. She does not live in Paris now. I have written to her, my letters have remained without answer. Did she ever get them? I think not. Something tells me that she has not forgotten me."

She remained silent for a few moments before resuming the thread of her narrative, as if lost in thoughts of the past. And then she resumed: "It was thus brutally that I was sent off. It would have been useless to beg

for pity, I knew ; and, moreover, I have never known how to do so. I hurriedly piled up in two trunks and in some handboxes all I had in the world, all I had received from the generosity of my poor mistress ; and before the stated hour I was ready. The cook and the chambermaid had already gone. The man who was treating me so cruelly was waiting for me. He helped me to carry out my things, after which he locked the door, put the key in his pocket, and as a tram-car was passing, he beckoned to the driver to stop. And then, before entering, 'Good luck, my pretty girl !' he said with a laugh. This was in the month of January, 1866. I was just thirteen. I have had since then more terrible trials, and I have found myself in much more desperate situations ; but I do not remember ever feeling such intense discouragement as I did that day when I was alone upon that road, not knowing which way to go. I sat down on one of my trunks. The weather was cold and gloomy ; there were few passers-by. They looked at me, doubtless wondering what I was doing there. I wept. I had a vague feeling that the well-meant kindness of my poor benefactress, in bestowing upon me the blessings of education, would in reality prove a serious impediment in the life-struggle which I was about to begin again. I thought of what I suffered with the laundress ; and, at the idea of the tortures which the future still held in store for me, I desired death. The Seine was near. Why not put an end at once to the miserable existence which I foresaw ? Such were my reflections, when a woman from Rueil, an itinerant green-grocer, whom I knew by sight, happened to pass, pushing her hand-cart before her over the muddy pavement. She stopped when she saw me ; and, in the softest voice she could command, 'What are you doing there, my darling ?' she asked. In a few words I explained to her my situation. She seemed more surprised than moved. 'Such is life,' she remarked, 'sometimes up, sometimes down.' And, stepping up nearer, 'What do you expect to do now ?' she interrogated in a tone of voice so different from that in which she had spoken at first, that I felt more keenly the horror of my altered situation. 'I have no idea,' I replied. After thinking for a moment, 'You can't stay here,' she resumed : 'the gendarmes will arrest you. Come with me. We will talk things over at home ; and I'll give you my advice.' I was so completely crushed that I had neither strength nor will. Besides, what was the use of thinking ? Had I any choice of resolutions ? Finally, the woman's offer seemed to me a last favour of destiny. 'I will do as you say, madame,' I replied. She proceeded at once to place my luggage on her truck. We started ; and soon we arrived 'home.' What she called thus was a sort of cellar, at least twelve inches lower than the street, receiving its only light through the glass door, in which several broken panes had been replaced by sheets of paper. It was revoltingly filthy, and filled with a sickening odour. On all sides were heaps of vegetables—cabbages, potatoes, onions. In one corner a nameless heap of decaying rags, which she called her bed ; in the centre, a small cast-iron stove, the worn-out pipe of which allowed the smoke to escape into the room. 'Anyway,' she said to me, 'you have a home now !' I helped her to unload the cart. She filled the stove with coal, and at once declared that she wanted to inspect my things. My trunks were opened ; and it was with exclamations of surprise that the woman handled my dresses, my skirts, my stockings. 'The mischief !' she exclaimed, 'you dressed well, didn't you ?' Her eyes sparkled so that a strong feeling of mistrust rose in my mind. She seemed to consider all my property as an unexpected godsend to herself. Her hands trembled as she

handled some piece of jewellery ; and she took me to the light that she might better estimate the value of my earrings. So, when she asked me if I had any money, determined to hide at least my twenty-franc-piece, which was my sole fortune, I replied boldly, 'No.' 'That's a pity,' she grumbled. But she wished to know my history, and I was compelled to tell it to her. One thing only surprised her—my age. And in fact, though only thirteen, I looked fully sixteen. When I had done, 'Never mind !' she said. 'It was lucky for you that you met me. You are at least certain now of eating every day, for I am going to take charge of you. I am getting old ; you'll help me to push my cart. If you are as smart as you are pretty, we'll make money.' Nothing could suit me less. But how could I resist ? She threw a few rags upon the floor ; and on them I had to sleep. The next day, wearing my meanest dress, and a pair of wooden shoes which she had bought for me, and which bruised my feet horribly, I had to harness myself to the cart by means of a leather strap, which cut my shoulders and my chest. She was an abominable creature, that woman ; and I soon found out that her repulsive features indicated but too well her ignoble instincts. After leading a life of vice and shame, she had, with the approach of old age, fallen into the most abject poverty, and had adopted the trade of selling vegetables, which she carried on just enough to escape absolute starvation. Enraged at her fate, she found a detestable pleasure in ill-treating me, or in endeavouring to stain my imagination by the foulest speeches. Ah ! if I had only known where to fly, and where to take refuge ! But, abusing my ignorance, that execrable woman persuaded me, that, if I attempted to go out alone, I should be arrested. And I knew no one to whom I could apply for protection and advice. And then I began to learn that beauty, to a poor girl, is a fatal gift. Little by little, the woman sold everything I had—dresses, underclothes, jewels ; and I was soon reduced to rags almost as loathsome as when I was with the laundress. Every morning, rain or shine, hot or cold, we started, wheeling our cart from village to village, all along the Seine, from Courbevoie to Port-Marly. I could see no end to this wretched existence, when one evening the commissary of police presented himself at our hovel, and ordered us to follow him. We were taken to prison ; and there I found myself thrown among some hundred women, whose faces, words, and gestures frightened me. The vegetable-woman had committed a theft ; and I was accused of complicity. Fortunately I was easily able to demonstrate my innocence ; and, at the end of two weeks, a jailer opened the door to me, saying, 'Go ! you are free !' "

Maxence understood now the gently ironical smile with which Mademoiselle Lucienne had heard him assert that he, too, had been very unhappy. What a life hers had been ! And how could such things be within a step of Paris, in the midst of a society which deems its organization too perfect to consent to modify it !

Mademoiselle Lucienne went on, speaking somewhat faster : "I was indeed free ; but of what use could my freedom be to me ? I knew not which way to go. A mechanical instinct took me back to Rueil. I fancied I would be safer among people who all knew me, and that I might find shelter in our old lodgings. But this last hope was disappointed. Immediately after our arrest, the owner of the hovel had thrown out everything it contained, and had rented it to a hideous beggar, who offered me with a giggle to become his housekeeper. I ran off as fast as I could. The situation was certainly more horrible then than the day when I had been

turned out of my benefactress's house. But the eight months I had just spent with the horrible woman had taught me anew how to bear misery, and had nerved my energy. I took out from a fold of my dress, where I had kept it constantly hid, the twenty-franc-piece I had received; and, as I was hungry, I entered a sort of eating and lodging-house, where I had occasionally taken a meal. The proprietor was a kind-hearted man. When I had told him my situation, he invited me to remain with him until I could find something better. On Sundays and Mondays the customers came in great numbers; and he was obliged to take an extra servant. He offered me the place, promising in exchange my lodging and one meal a day. I accepted. The next day being Sunday, I commenced the arduous duties of a servant in a low drinking-house. My gratuities amounted sometimes to five or ten francs; I had my board and lodging free; and at the end of three months I was able to provide myself with some decent clothing, and was commencing to accumulate a little reserve, when my master, whose business had unexpectedly developed itself to a considerable extent, decided to engage a man-waiter, and requested me to look elsewhere for work. I did so. An old neighbour of ours told me of a situation at Bougival, where she said I would be very comfortable. Overcoming my repugnance, I applied and was accepted. I was to get thirty francs a month. The place might have been a good one. There were only three in the family, the gentleman and his wife, and a son of twenty-five. Every morning father and son left for Paris by the first train, and only came home to dinner at about six o'clock. I was therefore alone all day with the woman. Unfortunately, she was a cross and disagreeable person, who, never having had a servant before, felt an insatiable desire of showing and exercising her authority. She was, moreover, extremely suspicious, and found some pretext to visit regularly my trunk once or twice a week to see if I had not concealed some of her napkins or silver spoons. Having foolishly told her that I had once been a laundress, she made me wash and iron all the clothes in the house, and was for ever accusing me of using too much soap and too much coal. Still I liked the place well enough; and I had a little attic, which I thought charming, and where I spent delightful evenings reading or sewing. But luck was against me. The young gentleman of the house took a fancy to me, and determined to make me his mistress. I discouraged him as much as I could; but he persisted in his loathsome attention, until one night he broke into my room, and I was compelled to shout for help with all my might before I could get rid of him. The next day I left that house; but I tried in vain to find another situation in Bougival. I resolved then to seek a place in Paris. I had a big trunk full of good clothes, and about a hundred francs of savings; and I felt no anxiety. When I arrived in Paris, I went straight to a registry-office. I was extremely well received by a very affable old woman, who promised to get me a good place, and in the meantime recommended me to board with her. She kept a sort of boarding-house for servants out of situations, and there were some fifty or sixty of us, who slept at night in long dormitories. Time went by, and still I did not find that famous place. The board was expensive, too, for my scanty means; and I determined to leave. I started in quest of new lodgings, followed by a porter, carrying my trunk; but as I was crossing the Boulevard, not getting quick enough out of the way of a handsome private carriage which was coming at a great pace, I was knocked down and trampled under the horses' feet."

Without allowing Maxence to interrupt her, she continued: "I lost

consciousness. When I came to my senses I was sitting in a chemist's shop, and three or four persons were busy around me. I had no fracture, but only some severe contusions, and a deep cut on the head. The physician who had attended me requested me to try and walk ; but I could not even stand on my feet. Then he asked me where I lived, that I might be taken there ; and I was compelled to own that I was a poor servant out of place, without a home or a friend to care for me. 'In that case,' said the doctor to the chemist, 'we must send her to the hospital.' And they sent for a cab. In the meantime quite a crowd had gathered outside ; and the conduct of the person who was in the carriage that had run over me was being indignantly criticised. It was a woman ; and I had caught a glimpse of her at the very moment I was falling under the horses' feet. She had not even condescended to get out of her carriage ; but, calling a policeman, she had given him her name and address, adding loud enough to be heard by the crowd, 'I am in too great a hurry to stop. My coachman is an awkward fellow, whom I shall dismiss as soon as I get home. I am ready to pay anything that may be asked.' She had also sent one of her cards for me, and I read the name, Baroness de Thaller. 'That's lucky for you,' said the doctor. 'That lady is the wife of a very rich banker ; and she will be able to help you when you get well.' The cab had now come. I was carried to it ; and an hour later I was admitted into the hospital and laid on a clean, comfortable bed. But my trunk ! my trunk, which contained all my things, all I had in the world, and worse still, all the money I had left ! I asked for it, my heart filled with anxiety. No one had either seen or heard of it. Had the porter missed me in the crowd ? or had he basely availed himself of the accident to rob me ? This was hard to decide. The nuns promised that they would have it looked after, and that the police, would certainly be able to find the man whom I had engaged near the registry office. But all these assurances failed to console me. This blow was the finishing one. I was seized with fever ; and for more than two weeks my life was despaired of. I was saved at last ; but my convalescence was long and tedious ; and for over two months I lingered with alternations of better and of worse. Yet such had been my misery for the past two years, that this gloomy stay in a hospital was for me like an oasis in the desert. The good nuns were very kind to me ; and when I was able, I helped them with their lighter work, or went to the chapel with them. I shuddered at the thought that I must leave them as soon as I was entirely well ; and then what would become of me ? for my trunk had not been found, and I was destitute of all. And yet I had at the hospital more than one subject for gloomy reflections. Twice a week, on Thursday and Sundays, visitors were admitted ; and there was not on those days a single patient who did not receive a relative or a friend. But I, no one, nothing, never ! But I am mistaken. I was commencing to get well, when one Sunday I saw by my bedside an old man, dressed all in black, of alarming appearance, wearing blue spectacles, and holding under his arm an enormous portfolio, crammed full of papers. 'You are Mademoiselle Lucienne, I believe,' he asked. 'Yes,' I replied, quite surprised. 'You are the person who was knocked down by a carriage at the corner of the Boulevard and the Faubourg St. Martin ?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Do you know whose equipage that was ?' 'The Baroness de Thaller's, I was told.' He seemed a little surprised, but at once asked : 'Have you seen that lady, or caused her to be seen on your behalf ?' 'No.' 'Have you heard from her in any manner ?' 'No.' A smile came to his lips. 'Luckily for you I am here,' he said. 'Several times

already I have called ; but you were too unwell to hear me. Now that you are better, listen.' And thereupon taking a chair, he commenced to explain his profession to me.

"He was a sort of broker ; and accidents were his specialty. As soon as one took place, he was notified by some friends of his at police headquarters. At once he started in quest of the victim, overtook him at home or at the hospital, and offered his services. For a moderate commission he undertook, if needs be, to recover damages. He commenced suit when necessary ; and if he thought the case tolerably safe, he made advances. He stated, for instance, that my case was a plain one, and that he would undertake to obtain four or five thousand francs at least from Madame de Thaller. All he wanted was my power of attorney. But in spite of his pressing instances, I declined his offers ; and he withdrew, very much displeased, assuring me that I would soon repent. Upon second thoughts, indeed, I regretted to have followed the first inspiration of my pride, and the more so, that the nuns whom I consulted on the subject told me that I was wrong, and that my reclamation would be perfectly proper. At their suggestion I then adopted another line of conduct, which they thought would as surely bring about the same result. As briefly as possible, I wrote out the history of my life from the day I had been left with the gardeners at Louveciennes. I added to it a faithful account of my present condition ; and I addressed the whole to Madame de Thaller. 'You'll see that she will quickly come to you,' said the nuns. They were mistaken. Madame de Thaller came neither the next nor the following days ; and I was still awaiting her answer, when one morning the doctor announced that I was well enough to leave the hospital. I cannot say that I was very sorry. I had lately made the acquaintance of a young work-woman, who had been sent to the hospital in consequence of a fall, and who occupied the bed next to mine. She was a girl of about twenty, very gentle, very obliging, and whose amiable countenance had attracted me from the first. Like myself, she had no parents. But she was rich, very rich. She owned the furniture of the room where she lived, a sewing-machine which had cost her three hundred francs, and, like a true child of Paris, she understood five or six trades, the least lucrative of which yielded her twenty-five or thirty sous a day. In less than a week we had become great friends ; and when she left the hospital, she said : 'Believe me, when you come out yourself don't waste your time looking for a place. Come to me ; I can accommodate you. I'll teach you what I know ; and if you are industrious, you'll easily earn your living and you'll be free.' It was to her then that I went straight from the hospital, carrying, tied in a handkerchief, my entire possessions : one dress and a few undergarments that the kind nuns had given me. She received me like a sister, and after showing me her lodging, two little attic-rooms shining with cleanliness. 'You'll see,' she said, kissing me, 'how happy we'll be here.'"

XXVIII.

It was getting late. M. Fortin had long ago come up and put out the gas on the stairs. One by one, every noise had died away in the hotel. Nothing now disturbed the silence of the night save the distant sound of some belated cab on the Boulevard. But neither Maxence nor Lucienne noticed the flight of time, so interested were they, one in telling and the other in

listening to this story of a wonderful existence. However, Lucienne's voice had become hoarse with fatigue. She poured herself out a glass of water, which she emptied at a draught, and then at once resumed her narrative.

"Never yet," she said, "had I been agitated by such a sweet sensation. My eyes were full of tears; but they were tears of gratitude and joy. After so many years of isolation, to meet with such a friend, so generous, and so devoted: it was like finding a family. For a few weeks, I thought that fate had relented at last. My friend was an excellent work-woman; but with some intelligence, and the will to learn, I soon knew as much as she did. There was plenty to do. By working twelve hours, with the help of the thrice-blessed sewing-machine, we succeeded in earning six, seven, and even eight francs a day. It was a fortune. Thus several months elapsed in comparative comfort. Once more I was afloat, and I had more clothes than I had lost in my trunk. I liked the life I was leading; and I would be leading it still, if my friend had not one day fallen desperately in love with a young man she had met at a ball. I disliked him very much, and took no trouble to conceal my feelings; nevertheless, my friend imagined that I had designs upon him, and became fiercely jealous of me. Jealousy does not reason; and I soon understood that we would no longer be able to live in common, and that I must look elsewhere for shelter. But my friend gave me no time to do so. Coming home one Monday night at about eleven, she notified me to clear out at once. I attempted to expostulate; she replied with abuse. Rather than enter upon a degrading struggle, I yielded and went out. That night I spent on a chair in a neighbour's room. But the next day, when I went for my things, my former friend refused to give them, and presumed to keep everything. I was compelled, though reluctantly, to resort to the intervention of the commissary of police. I gained my point. But the good days had gone. Luck did not follow me to the wretched furnished house where I hired a room. I had no sewing-machine, and but few acquaintances. By working fifteen or sixteen hours a day, I made thirty or forty sous. That was not enough to live on. Then work failed me altogether, and, piece by piece, everything I had went to the pawnbroker's. On a gloomy December morning I was turned out of my room, and left on the pavement with half-a-franc for my fortune. Never had I been so low; and I know not to what extremities I might have come at last, when I happened to think of that wealthy lady whose horses had upset me on the Boulevard. I had kept her card. Without hesitation, I went into a milk-shop, and, calling for some paper and a pen, I wrote, overcoming the last struggle of my pride. 'Do you remember, madame, a poor girl whom your carriage came near crushing to death? Once before she applied to you, and received no answer. She is to-day without shelter and without bread; and you are her supreme hope.' I placed these few lines in an envelope and ran to the address indicated on the card. It was a magnificent residence, with a vast court-yard in front. In the concierge's lodge, five or six servants were talking as I came in, and they looked at me impudently, from head to foot, when I requested them to take my letter to Madame de Thaller. One of them, however, took pity on me. 'Come with me,' he said, 'come along!' He made me cross the court-yard, and enter the vestibule; and then added: 'Give me your letter, and wait here for me.'"

Maxence was about to express the thoughts which Madame de Thaller's name naturally suggested to his mind; but Mademoiselle Lucienne interrupted him. "In all my life," she continued, "I had never seen anything so magnificent as this vestibule with its tall columns, its tessellated

marble floor, its large bronze flower-stands filled with the rarest flowers, and its velvet-covered seats, upon which tall footmen in brilliant livery were lounging. I was, I confess, somewhat intimidated by the sight of all this splendour; and I remained awkwardly standing, when suddenly the servants stood up respectfully. A door had just opened, through which appeared a man already past middle age, tall, thin, dressed in the extreme of fashion, and wearing long red whiskers falling over his chest."

"The Baron de Thaller," murmured Maxence.

Mademoiselle Lucienne took no notice of the interruption. "The attitude of the servants," she went on, "had made me easily guess that he was the master. I was bowing to him, blushing and embarrassed, when, suddenly perceiving me, he stopped short, shuddering from head to foot. 'Who are you?' he asked me roughly. I attributed his manner to the sad condition of my clothes, which appeared more miserable and more dilapidated still amid the surrounding splendours; and, in scarcely an intelligible voice, I began, 'I am a poor girl, sir—' But he interrupted me. 'To the point! What do you want?' 'I am awaiting an answer, sir, to a note which I have just forwarded to the baroness.' 'What about?' 'Once, sir, I was run over in the street by the baroness's carriage. I was severely hurt, and had to be taken to the hospital.' I noticed something like terror in the man's look. 'It is you, then, who once before sent a long letter to my wife, in which you told the story of your life?' 'Yes, sir, it was I.' 'You stated in that letter that you had no parents, having been left by your mother with some gardeners at Louveciennes?' 'That is the truth.' 'What has become of those gardeners?' 'They are dead.' 'What was your mother's name?' 'I never knew.' To M. de Thaller's first surprise had succeeded a feeling of evident irritation; but the more haughty and brutal his manners, the cooler and the more self-possessed I became. 'And you are soliciting assistance?' he resumed. I drew myself up, and, looking him straight in the face, 'I beg your pardon,' I replied, 'it is a legitimate indemnity which I claim.' Indeed, it seemed to me that my firmness alarmed him. With feverish haste, he began to feel in his pockets. He took out all the gold and bank-notes they contained, and, thrusting the money into my hands without counting, said: 'Here, take this. Are you satisfied?' I observed to him, that, having sent a note to Madame de Thaller, it would perhaps be more polite to await her answer. But he replied that it was not necessary, and, pushing me towards the door, exclaimed: 'You may depend upon it, I will tell my wife that I saw you.' I withdrew; but I had not gone ten steps across the court-yard, when I heard him cry excitedly to his servants: 'You see that beggar-girl, don't you? Well, the first one who allows her to cross the threshold of my door shall be dismissed on the instant.' A beggar. I! Ah the wretch! I turned round to cast his alms in his face; but he had already disappeared, and I only saw the footmen chuckling stupidly. I went out; and, as my anger gradually passed off, I felt thankful that I had been unable to follow the dictates of my wounded pride. 'Poor girl,' I thought to myself, 'where would you be at this hour? You would only have to select between suicide and the vilest existence; whereas now you are above want.' I was passing before a small restaurant. I went in; for I was very hungry, having, so to speak, eaten nothing for several days past. Besides, I felt anxious to count my treasure. The Baron de Thaller had given me nine hundred and thirty francs. This sum, which exceeded the utmost limits of my ambition, seemed inexhaustible to me. I was dazzled by its possession. 'And yet,'

I thought, 'had M. de Thaller happened to have had ten thousand francs in his pockets, he would have given them to me all the same.' I was at a loss to explain this strange generosity. Why his surprise when he first saw me, then his anger, and his haste to get rid of me? How was it that a man whose mind must be filled with the gravest cares had so distinctly remembered me, and the letter I had written to his wife? Why, after showing himself so generous, had he so strictly excluded me from his house? After vainly trying for some time to solve this riddle, I concluded that I must be the victim of my own imagination; and I turned my attention to making the best possible use of my sudden fortune. On the same day I took a little room in the Faubourg St. Denis; and I bought myself a sewing-machine. Before the week was over, I had work before me for several months. Ah! this time it seemed indeed that I had nothing more to apprehend from destiny, and I looked forward, without fear, to the future. At the end of a month, I was earning four to five francs a day, when, one afternoon, a stout man, very well dressed, looking honest and good-natured, and speaking French with some difficulty, made his appearance at my room. He was an American, he stated, and had been sent to me by the person for whom I worked. Having need of a skilled Parisian workwoman, he came to propose to me to go with him to New York, where he would insure me a brilliant position. But I knew several poor girls, who, on the faith of dazzling promises, had expatriated themselves. Once abroad, they had been shamefully abandoned, and had been driven, to escape starvation, to resort to the vilest expedients. I refused, therefore, and frankly gave him my reasons for doing so. My visitor at once protested indignantly. Whom did I take him for? It was a fortune that I was refusing. He guaranteed me in New York board, lodging, and two hundred francs a month. He would pay all travelling and moving expenses. And, to prove to me the fairness of his intentions, he was ready, he said, to sign an agreement, and pay me a thousand francs down. These offers were so brilliant that I was staggered in my resolution. 'Well,' I said, 'give me twenty-four hours to think it over. I wish to consult my employer.' He seemed very much annoyed; but, as I remained firm in my purpose, he left, promising to return the next day to receive my final answer. I went at once to my employer. She did not know what I was talking about. She had sent no one, and was not acquainted with any American. Of course, I never saw him again; and I couldn't help thinking of this singular adventure, when, one evening during the following week, as I was coming home at about eleven o'clock, two policemen arrested me, and, in spite of my earnest protestations, took me to the station-house, where I was locked up with a dozen unfortunates who had just been taken up on the Boulevards. I spent the night crying with shame and anger; and I don't know what would have become of me, if the officer who examined me the next morning, had not happened to be a just and kind man. As soon as I had explained that I was the victim of a most humiliating error, he sent an agent in quest of information, and having satisfied himself that I was a virtuous girl, working for my living, he discharged me. But before permitting me to go, he said: 'Beware, my child; it was upon a formal and well-authenticated declaration that you were arrested. Therefore you must have enemies; people who have an interest in getting rid of you.'

Mademoiselle Lucienne was evidently almost exhausted with fatigue: her voice was failing her. But it was in vain that Maxence begged her to take a few moments' rest.

"No," she answered, "I would rather get through as quickly as possible." And making an effort she hurriedly resumed her narrative.

"I returned home, my mind all disturbed by the police-officer's warnings. I am no coward; but it is a terrible thing to feel one's self incessantly threatened by an unknown and mysterious danger, against which nothing can be done. In vain did I search my past life: I could think of no one who could have any interest in effecting my ruin. Those alone have enemies who have had friends. I had never had but one friend, the kind-hearted girl who had turned me out of her home in a fit of absurd jealousy. But I knew her well enough to know that she was incapable of malice, and that she must long since have forgotten the unlucky cause of our rupture. Week after week passed without any new incident. I had plenty of work, and was earning enough money to begin saving. So I felt comfortable, laughed at my former fears, and neglected the precautions which I had taken at first; when, one evening, my employer, having a very important and pressing order, sent for me. We did not get through our work until long after midnight. She wished me to spend the rest of the night with her; but it would have been necessary to make up a bed for me, and disturb the whole household. 'Never mind,' I said, 'this will not be the first time I have been out in the middle of the night.' I went off, and I was going along, walking as fast as I could, when, from the angle of a dark, narrow street, a man sprang upon me, threw me down, struck me, and would doubtless have killed me, but for two brave gentlemen who heard my screams and rushed to my assistance. The man ran off; and I was able to walk the rest of the way home, having received but a very slight wound. But early the next morning I went to see my friend, the police-officer. He listened to me gravely, and when I had concluded, 'How were you dressed?' he inquired. 'All in black,' I replied, 'very modestly, like a workwoman.' 'Had you nothing on your person that could tempt a thief?' 'Nothing. No watch-chain, no jewellery, no earrings even.' 'Then,' he exclaimed, knitting his brows, 'it is not a fortuitous crime; it is another attempt on the part of your enemies.' 'But, sir,' I objected, 'who can wish to injure me, poor, obscure girl as I am? I have thought carefully and well, and I have not a single enemy that I know of.' And, as I had full confidence in his kindness, I at once told him the story of my life. 'You are a natural child,' he said, as soon as I had done, 'and you have been basely abandoned. That fact alone would be sufficient to justify every supposition. You do not know your parents; but it is quite possible that *they* may know you, and that they may never have lost sight of you. Your mother was a work-girl, you think? That may be. But your father? Do you know what interests your existence may threaten? Do you know what elaborate edifice of falsehood and infamy your sudden appearance might tumble to the ground?' I listened with astonishment. Never had such conjectures crossed my mind, and, whilst I doubted their probability, I had at least to admit their possibility. 'What must I do, then?' I inquired. The police-officer shook his head. 'Indeed, my poor child, I hardly know what to advise. The police are not omnipotent. They can do nothing to anticipate a crime conceived in the brain of an unknown scoundrel.' I was terrified. He saw it and took pity on me. 'In your place,' he added, 'I would change my domicile. You might, perhaps, thus make them lose your track. And, above all, do not fail to give me your new address. Whatever I can do to protect you and insure your safety, I will do.'

"That excellent man has kept his word; and once again I owed my

safety to him. He is now commissary of police of this district, and it was he who protected me against Madame Fortin. I hastened to follow his advice, and two days later I had hired the room in this house in which I am still living. In order to avoid every chance of discovery I left my employer, and requested her to say, if anyone came to inquire after me, that I had gone to America. I soon obtained work in a very fashionable dressmaking establishment, of which you have probably heard, Van Klopen's. Unfortunately war had just been declared. Every day announced a new defeat. The Prussians were coming; then the siege began. M. Van Klopen had closed his establishment and left Paris. I had a few savings, thank heaven, and I husbanded them as carefully as shipwrecked mariners do their last ration of food, when I unexpectedly obtained some work. It was one Sunday, and I had gone out for a walk when some battalions of National Guards passed along the Boulevards. I stopped to watch them, and suddenly I saw one of the *vivandières*, who was marching behind the band, leave the ranks and run towards me with open arms. It was my old Batignolles friend, who had recognized me. She threw her arms round my neck, and we at once became the centre of a group of at least five hundred idlers. 'I must speak to you,' she said. 'If you live in the neighbourhood, let's go to your room. The service must wait.' I brought her here; and she at once commenced to excuse herself for her past conduct, begging me to restore her my friendship. As I expected, she had long since forgotten the young man, cause of our rupture. But she was now in love, and seriously this time, she declared, with a furniture-maker, who was a captain in the National Guards. It was through him that she had become a *vivandière*; and she offered me a similar position if I wished it. But I did not care for it; and, as I was complaining that I could obtain no work, she swore that she would get me some through her captain, who was a very influential man. Through him, I did in fact obtain a few dozen jackets to make. This work was very poorly paid; but the little I earned was so much less to take from my humble resources. In that way I managed to pull through the siege without suffering too much. After the armistice, unfortunately, M. Van Klopen, not having yet returned, I was unable to procure any work; my resources were exhausted, and I would have starved during the Commune, but for my friend, who several times brought me a little money, and some provisions. Her captain was now a colonel, and was about to become a member of the government, at least, so she assured me, and he had promised to marry her. The entrance of the troops into Paris put an end to her dream. One night she came to me livid with fear. She supposed herself gravely compromised, and begged me to hide her. For four days she remained with me. On the fifth, just as we were sitting down to dinner, my room was invaded by a number of police-agents, who showed us an order of arrest, and commanded us to follow them. My friend sank down upon a chair, stupid with fright. But I retained my presence of mind, and persuaded one of the agents to go and notify my friend the commissary. He happened luckily to be at home, and at once hastened to my assistance. He could do nothing, however, for the moment; the agents having positive orders to take us straight to Versailles. 'Well,' said he, 'I will accompany you.'

"From the very first steps he took the next morning, he discovered that my position was indeed critical. But he also and very clearly recognized a new device of the enemy to bring about my destruction. The information filed against me stated that I had remained in the service of the Commune to the last moment; that I had been seen behind a barricade with a gun in

my hand ; and that I had formed one of a band of vile incendiaries. This infamous scheme had evidently been suggested by my relations with my Batignolles friend, who was still more terribly compromised than she thought, poor girl, her colonel having been captured, and convicted of pillage and murder, and herself charged with complicity. Isolated as I was, without resources, and without relatives, I would certainly have perished, but for the devoted efforts of my friend the commissary, whose official position gave him access everywhere, and enabled him to reach my judges. He succeeded in demonstrating my entire innocence ; and after forty-eight hours' detention, which seemed an age to me, I was set at liberty. At the door I found the man who had just saved me. He was waiting for me, but would not suffer me to express the gratitude with which my heart overflowed. 'You shall thank me,' he said, 'when I have deserved it better. I have done nothing as yet that any honest man wouldn't have done in my place. What I wish is to discover what interests you are threatening without knowing it, and which must be considerable, if I may judge by the passion and the tenacity of those who are pursuing you. What I desire to do is to lay hands upon the cowardly rascals in whose way you seem to stand.' I shook my head. 'You will not succeed,' I said to him. 'Who knows? I've done harder things than that in my life.' And, taking a large envelope from his pocket, 'This,' he said, 'is the letter which caused your arrest. I have examined it attentively, and I am certain that the handwriting is not disguised. That's something to start with, and may enable me to verify any suspicions which may occur to my mind. In the meantime, return quietly to Paris, resume your ordinary occupations, answer vaguely any questions that may be asked about this matter, and, above all, never mention my name. Remain at the Hôtel des Folies : it is in my district, in my legitimate sphere of action ; besides, the proprietors are in such a position that they dare not disobey my orders. Never come to my office unless something grave and unforeseen should occur. Our chances of success would be seriously compromised if any one suspected the interest I take in your welfare. Keep your eyes open on everything that is going on around you, and if you notice anything suspicious write to me. I will myself organize a secret surveillance around you. If I can bag one of the rascals who are watching you, I will make him tell me who employs him. And now,' added this worthy man, 'good-by. Patience and courage.' Unfortunately, he had not thought of offering me a little money ; I had not dared to ask him for any, and I had but eight sous left. It was on foot, therefore, that I was compelled to return to Paris. Madame Fortin received me with open arms. With me returned the hope of recovering the hundred and odd francs which I owed her, and which she had given up for lost. Moreover, she had excellent news for me. M. Van Klopen had sent for me during my absence, requesting me to call at his work-rooms. Tired as I was, I went to see him at once. I found him very much downcast by the poor prospects of business. Still he was determined to go on, and offered to employ me, not as workwoman, as heretofore, but to try on garments for customers, at a salary of one hundred and twenty francs a month. I was not in a position to be very particular. I accepted ; and I am there still. Every morning when I arrive I take off this simple costume, and I put on a sort of livery that belongs to M. Van Klopen—ample skirts, and a black silk dress. Then, whenever a customer comes who wants a cloak, a mantle, or some other garment, I step up and put it on, that the purchaser may see how it looks. I have to walk, to turn

around, sit down, &c. It is absurdly ridiculous, often humiliating; and many a time, during the first days, I felt tempted to give back to M. Van Klopen his black silk dress. But the conjectures of my friend the commissary were constantly agitating my brain. Since I thought he had discovered a mystery in my existence, I indulged in all sorts of fancies, and was momentarily expecting some extraordinary occurrence, some compensation of destiny. And I remained. But I was not yet at the end of my troubles."

Since she had been speaking of M. Van Klopen, Mademoiselle Lucienne seemed to have lost her tone of haughty assurance and imperturbable coolness; and it was with a look of mingled confusion and sadness that she continued: "What I was doing at Van Klopen's was exceedingly painful to me; and yet he very soon asked me to do something more painful still. Gradually Paris was filling again. The hotels had re-opened; foreigners were pouring in; and the Bois Boulogne was partly resuming its wonted animation. Still, but few orders came in, and those for dresses of the utmost simplicity, of dark colour and plain material, on which it was hard to make twenty-five per cent profit. Van Klopen was disconsolate. He kept speaking to me of the good old days, when some of his customers spent as much as thirty thousand francs a month for dresses and trifles, until one day, 'You are the only one,' he said to me, 'who can help me just now. You are really good looking; and I am sure that in full dress, reclining on the cushions of a handsome carriage, you would create quite a sensation, and that all the rest of the women would be jealous of you, and would wish to look like you. There needs but one, you know, to give a good example.'"

Maxence started up suddenly, and striking his forehead with his hand, "Ah, I understand now!" he exclaimed.

"I thought that Van Klopen was jesting," went on the young girl. "But he had never been more in earnest; and, to prove it, he commenced explaining to me what he wanted. He proposed to make up for me some of those costumes which are sure to attract attention; and two or three times a week he would send me a fine carriage, and I would go and show myself in the Bois. I felt disgusted at the proposition. 'Never!' I said. 'Why not?' 'Because I respect myself too much to become a living advertisement.' He shrugged his shoulders. 'You are wrong,' he said. 'You are not rich, and I would give you twenty francs each time. At the rate of eight rides a month, it would be one hundred and sixty francs added to your wages. Besides,' he added with a wink, 'it would be an excellent opportunity for you to make your fortune. Pretty as you are, who knows but what some millionaire might take a fancy to you!' I felt indignant. 'For that reason alone, if for no other,' I exclaimed, 'I refuse.' 'You are a little fool,' he replied. 'If you do not accept, you will cease belonging to my establishment. Therefore you had better reflect!' My mind was already made up, and I was thinking of looking out for some other employment when I received a note from my friend the commissary, requesting me to call at his office. I did so, and, after kindly inviting me to a seat, 'Well,' he asked, 'what is there new?' 'Nothing. I have noticed no one watching me.' He look annoyed. 'My agents have not detected anything either,' he grumbled. 'And yet it is evident that your enemies cannot have given it up yet. They are sharp fellows: if they keep quiet, it is because they are preparing some new trick. What it is I must and shall find out. Already I have an idea which would be an excellent one

it could discover some way of introducing you among what is called good society.' I explained to him, that being employed at Van Klopen's I had an opportunity of seeing there many ladies of the best society. 'That is not enough,' he said. Then M. Van Klopen's propositions came back to my mind, and I told him of them. 'Just the thing!' he exclaimed, starting up in his chair, 'and a manifest proof that luck is with us. You must accept.' I felt bound to tell him my objections, which reflection had much increased. 'I know but too well,' I said, 'what must happen if I accept this odious employment. Before I have been four times to the Bois, I shall be noticed; and every one will imagine that they know for what purpose I come there. I shall be assailed with vile offers. True, I have no fears for myself. I shall always be better guarded by my pride than by the most watchful of parents. But my reputation will be lost.' I failed to convince him. 'I know very well that you are a good and virtuous girl,' he said to me; 'but, for that very reason, what do you care for the thoughts of all these people whom you do not know? Your future is at stake. I repeat it, you must accept.' 'If you command me to do so,' I said. 'Yes, I command you; and I will explain to you why.'"

For the first time, Mademoiselle Lucienne manifested some reticence, and omitted to repeat the commissary's explanations. And after a few moments' pause, "You know the rest, neighbour," she said, "since you have seen me yourself in that inept and ridiculous character of a living advertisement, of a fashionable lay-figure; and the result has been just as I expected. Can you find any one who believes in my virtue? You heard Madame Fortin to-night? Yourself, neighbour, what sort of a woman did you take me for? And yet you should have noticed something of my suffering and my humiliation the day that you were watching me so closely in the Bois de Boulogne."

"What!" exclaimed Maxence with a start, "you know?"

"Have I not just told you that I always fear being watched and followed, and that I am always on the lookout? Yes, I know that you tried to discover the secret of my rides."

Maxence tried to excuse himself.

"Well, never mind," she exclaimed. "You wish to be my friend, you say? Now that you know my whole life almost as well as I do myself, reflect, and to-morrow you will tell me the result of your reflections."

And she hurriedly left the room.

XXIX.

FOR a minute or more Maxence remained lost in astonishment; and when he recovered his voice and his presence of mind, Mademoiselle Lucienne had disappeared, and he could hear her bolting her door and striking a match against the wall. The night was almost ended; four o'clock had just struck. Still he did not feel in the least sleepy. His head was heavy, his temples throbbing, his eyes smarting. Opening his window he leaned out to breathe the morning air. The day was dawning pale and cold. A furtive and livid light glided along the damp walls of the narrow court-yard of the Hôtel des Folies, as at the bottom of a well. Already arose those confused noises which announce the awakening of Paris, and above which can be heard the sonorous rolling of the market carts, the loud slamming of doors, and the sharp sound of hurrying steps on the hard pavement. But soon Maxence

felt a chill coming over him. He closed the window, threw some more wood on the fire, and stretched himself on his chair, his feet towards the blaze. It was a most serious event which had just occurred in his existence; and as much as he could he endeavoured to measure its bearings, and to calculate its consequences in the future. He kept thinking of the story of that strange girl, her haughty frankness when unrolling certain phases of her life, of her wonderful impassibility, and of the implacable contempt for humanity which her every word betrayed. Where had she learned that dignity, so simple and so noble, that measured speech, that admirable respect of herself, which had enabled her to pass through so much filth without receiving a stain? "What a woman!" he thought.

Before knowing her, he loved her. Now he was convulsed by one of those exclusive passions which master the whole being. Already he felt himself so much under the charm, subjugated, dominated, fascinated; he understood so well that he was going to cease being his own master; that his free will was about escaping from him; that he would be in Mademoiselle Lucienne's hands like wax under the modeller's fingers; he saw himself so thoroughly at the discretion of an energy superior to his own that he was almost frightened. "It is my whole future that I am going to risk," he thought. And there was no middle path. Either he must fly at once, without waiting for Mademoiselle Lucienne to awake, fly without looking behind, or else stay and then accept all the chances of an incurable passion for a woman who, perhaps, might never love him. And he remained wavering like the traveller who finds himself at the intersection of two roads, and knowing that one leads to the goal and the other to an abyss, hesitates which to take. With this difference, however, that if the traveller errs, and discovers his error, he is always free to retrace his steps; whereas man, in life, can never return to his starting-point. Every step he takes is final; and if he has erred, if he has taken the fatal road, there is no remedy. "Well, no matter?" exclaimed Maxence. "It shall not be said that through cowardice I have allowed that happiness to escape which passes within my reach. I shall stay." And at once he began to examine what he might reasonably expect; for there was no mistaking Mademoiselle Lucienne's intentions. When she said, "Do you wish to be friends?" she had meant exactly that, and nothing else—friends, and only friends. "And yet," thought Maxence, "if I had not inspired her with a real interest, would she have so wholly confided in me? She is not ignorant of the fact that I love her; and she knows life too well to suppose that I shall cease to love her when she has allowed me a certain amount of intimacy." His heart filled with hope at the idea. "My mistress," he thought, "never, evidently. But my wife? Why not?" The next moment, however, he became a prey to the bitterest discouragement. He thought that perhaps Mademoiselle Lucienne might have some special interest in thus making a confidant of him. She had not told him the explanations given her by the police-officer. She had, perhaps, succeeded in lifting a corner of the veil which hid the secret of her birth! Was she on the track of her enemies? and had she discovered the motive of their animosity? "Is it possible," asked Maxence of himself, "that I am but one of the pawns in the game she is playing? How do I know that, if she wins, she will not cast me off?"

In the midst of these thoughts, he had gradually fallen asleep, murmuring to the last the name of Lucienne. The creaking of his door opening woke him up suddenly. He started to his feet, and perceived Mademoiselle

Lucienne coming in. "How is this?" she asked. "Have you not been to bed?"

"You advised me to reflect," he replied, "and I have been reflecting." He looked at his watch; it was twelve o'clock. "However," he added, "it did not apparently keep me from going to sleep." All the doubts that besieged him at the moment when he had been overcome by sleep now came back to his mind with painful vividness. "And not only have I been sleeping," he went on, "but I have been dreaming also."

Mademoiselle Lucienne fixed her large black eyes upon him. "Can you tell me your dream?" she asked.

He hesitated. Had he had but one minute to reflect, perhaps he would not have spoken; but he was taken unawares. "I dreamt," he replied, "that we were friends in the noblest and purest acceptation of that word. Intelligence, heart, will, I laid everything at your feet. You accepted the most entire, the most respectful, and the most tender devotion that man is capable of. Yes, we were friends indeed; and upon a vague hope, never expressed, I planned a whole future of happiness." He stopped. "Well?" she asked.

"Well, when my hopes seemed on the point of being realized, it happened that the mystery of your birth was suddenly revealed to you. You belonged to a family noble, powerful, and wealthy. You resumed the illustrious name of which you had been robbed; your enemies were crushed and your rights were restored to you. It was no longer Van Klopen's hired carriage that stopped in front of the Hôtel des Folies, but a carriage bearing a gorgeous coat-of-arms. That carriage was yours, and it came to take you to your own residence in the Faubourg St. Germain, or to your ancestral château."

"And yourself?" inquired the young girl.

Maxence repressed one of those nervous spasms which frequently break out in tears, and with a gloomy look, "I," he answered, "standing on the edge of the pavement, I waited for a word or a look from you. You had forgotten my very existence. Your coachman whipped his horses; they started at a gallop; and soon I lost sight of you. And then a voice, the inexorable voice of stern reality, cried to me, 'You will never see her again!'"

Lucienne drew herself up proudly. "It is not with your heart, I trust, that you judge me, M. Maxence Favoral," she exclaimed.

He trembled, lest he had offended her. "I beseech you—" he began.

But she continued in a voice vibrating with emotion. "I am not one of those who basely deny their past. Your dream will never be realized. Those things are only seen on the stage. If it did realize itself, however, if the carriage with the coat-of-arms did come to the door, the companion of my evil days, the friend who offered me his month's salary to pay my debt, would have a seat by my side."

This was more happiness than Maxence had dared to hope for. He tried, in order to express his gratitude, to find some of those words which always seem to be lacking at the most critical moments. But he was suffocating; and the tears, accumulated by so many successive emotions, were filling his eyes. With a passionate impulse he seized Lucienne's hand, and raising it to his lips he covered it with kisses. Gently but resolutely she withdrew it, and fixing upon him her beautiful clear gaze, "Friends," she said. Her accent alone would have been sufficient to dissipate Maxence's presumptuous illusions had he had any. But he had none.

"Friends only," he replied, "until the day when you shall be my wife. You cannot forbid me to hope. You love no one?"

"No one."

"Well, since we are going to tread the path of life side by side, let me hope that we may find love at some turn of the road." She made no answer. And thus was sealed between them a treaty of friendship, to which they were to remain so strictly faithful, that the word "love" never once rose to their lips.

In appearance there was no change in their mode of life. Every morning at seven o'clock Mademoiselle Lucienne went to M. Van Klopen's, and an hour later Maxence started for his office. They met again after the day's work, and as it was winter-time, they spent their evenings together by the fireside. But what was easy to foresee now took place.

Weak and undecided by nature, Maxence began very soon to feel the influence of the obstinate and energetic character of the girl. She infused, as it were in his veins a warmer and more generous blood. Gradually she imbued him with her ideas, and from her own will gave him one. He had told her in all sincerity his history, the miseries of his home, M. Favoral's parsimony and exaggerated severity, his mother's resigned timidity, and Gilberte's resolute nature. He had concealed nothing of his past life, of his errors and his follies, confessing even the worst of his actions; as, for instance, having abused his mother's and sister's affection to extort from them all the money they earned. He had admitted to her that it was only with great reluctance, and under pressure of necessity, that he worked at all; that he was far from being rich; that although he took his dinner with his parents, his salary barely sufficed for his wants; and that he had debts. He hoped, however, he added, that it would not be always thus, and that, sooner or later, he would see the term of all this misery and privation; for his father had at least fifty thousand francs a year, and some day he must be rich.

Far from smiling, Lucienne frowned at such a prospect. "Ah! your father is a millionaire, is he," she interrupted. "Well, I understand now how, at twenty-five, after refusing all the positions which have been offered to you, you have no position. You relied on your father instead of relying on yourself. Judging that he worked hard enough for two, you bravely folded your arms, waiting for that fortune which he is amassing, and which you seem to consider yours."

This view of the case seemed a little far-fetched to Maxence. "I think," he began, "that when one is the son of a rich man—"

"One has the right to be useless, I suppose?" added the young girl.

"I do not mean that; but—"

"There is no but about it. And the proof that your views are wrong is, that they have brought you where you are and deprived you of your own free will. To place one's self at the mercy of another, be that other your own father, is always silly; and one is always at the mercy of the man from whom one expects money that one has not earned. Your father would never have been so harsh had he not believed that you could not do without him."

He wanted to argue, she stopped him. "Do you wish the proof that you are at M. Favoral's mercy?" she asked. "Very well. You spoke of marrying me."

"Ah, if you were willing."

"Very well. Go and speak of it to your father."

"I suppose—"

"You don't suppose anything at all ; you are perfectly certain that he will refuse you his consent."

"I could do without it."

"I admit that you could. But do you know what he would do then ? He would arrange things in such a way that you would never get a centime of his fortune." Maxence had never thought of that. "Therefore," continued the young girl gayly, "though there is as yet no question of marriage, learn to secure your independence, that is to say, the means of living. And for that you must work."

It was from that moment that Madame Favoral noticed in her son the change that had surprised her so much. Under the inspiration, under the impulsion of Mademoiselle Lucienne, Maxence had been suddenly taken with a zeal for work, and a desire to earn money, of which he could never formerly have been suspected. He was no longer late at his office, and had not, at the end of each month, ten or fifteen francs' fines to pay. Every morning as soon as she was up, Mademoiselle Lucienne knocked at his door. "Come, get up !" she cried to him. And he jumped quickly out of bed and dressed, so that he might bid her good-morning before she left. In the evening the last mouthful of his dinner was hardly swallowed before he began copying the documents which he procured from M. Chapelain's successor. And often he worked quite late in the night, whilst by his side Mademoiselle Lucienne applied herself to some embroidery. She was the cashier of the association ; and she administered the common capital with such skilful and such scrupulous economy that Maxence soon succeeded in paying off his creditors. "Do you know," she said to him at the end of December, that, between us, we have earned over six hundred francs this month ?" On Sundays only, after a week of which not a minute had been lost, they indulged in some little recreation. If the weather was not too bad, they went out together, dined in some modest restaurant, and finished the day at the theatre. Having thus a common existence, both young, free, and having their rooms divided only by a narrow passage, it was difficult that people should believe in the innocence of their intercourse. The proprietors of the Hôtel des Folies believed nothing of the kind ; and they were not alone in that opinion.

Mademoiselle Lucienne having continued to show herself in the Bois on the afternoons when the weather was fine, the number of fools who annoyed her with their attentions had greatly increased. Among the most obstinate was M. Costeclar, who was pleased to declare, upon his word of honour, that he had lost his sleep, and his taste for business, since the day when, together with M. Saint-Pavin, he had first seen her. The efforts of his valet, and the letters which he had written, having proved useless, M. Costeclar made up his mind to act in person ; and he gallantly posted himself on guard in front of the Hôtel des Folies. Great was his surprise when he saw Mademoiselle Lucienne come out arm-in-arm with Maxence ; and greater still was his spite. "That girl is a fool," he thought, "to prefer to me a fellow who has not two hundred francs a month to spend. But never mind ! He laughs best who laughs last." And, as he was a man fertile in expedients, he went the next day to take a stroll in the neighbourhood of the Mutual Credit Bank ; and, having met M. Favoral by chance, he told him how his son Maxence was ruining himself for a young lady whose dresses were a scandal, insinuating delicately that it was his duty, as the head of the family, to put a stop to such a thing.

This was precisely the time when Maxence was endeavouring to obtain a situation in the office of the Mutual Credit Bank. It is true that the idea did not originate with him, and that he had even vehemently rejected it, when, for the first time, Mademoiselle Lucienne had made the suggestion. "What!" had he exclaimed, "be employed in the same establishment as my father? Suffer at the office the same intolerable despotism as at home? I would rather break stones on the roads." But Lucienne was not the girl to give up so easily a project conceived and carefully matured by herself. She returned to the charge with that infinite art of women who understand so marvellously well how to turn a position which they cannot carry in front. She kept the matter so well before him, she spoke of it so often and so much, on every occasion, and under all pretexts, that he ended by persuading himself that it was the only reasonable and practical thing he could do, the only way in which he had any chance of making his fortune; and so, one evening, overcoming his last hesitations, "I will speak about it to my father," he said to Mademoiselle Lucienne. But whether he had been influenced by M. Costeclar's insinuations, or for some other reason, M. Favoral had indignantly rejected his son's request, saying that it was impossible to trust a young man who was ruining himself for the sake of a miserable creature. Maxence became crimson with rage on hearing thus spoken of the woman whom he loved to madness, and who, far from ruining him, was saving him.

He returned to the Hôtel des Folies in an indescribable state of exasperation. "There's the result," he said to Mademoiselle Lucienne after relating what had passed, "of the step you urged me so strongly to take."

She seemed neither surprised nor irritated. "Very well," she replied simply.

But Maxence could not resign himself so quietly to such a cruel disappointment; and, not having the slightest suspicion of Costeclar's doings, he added: "It is all through the gossip of these stupid shopkeepers who run to see you every time you go out in the carriage."

The girl shrugged her shoulders contemptuously. "I expected it," she said, "the day when I accepted M. Van Klopen's offers."

"Everybody believes that you are my mistress."

"What of that, since it is not so?"

Maxence did not dare to confess that this was precisely what made him doubly angry; and he shuddered at the thought of the ridicule that would certainly be heaped upon him if the true state of the case was known. "We ought to move," he suggested.

"What's the use? Wherever we might go, it would be the same thing. Besides, I don't want to leave this neighbourhood."

"And I am too much your friend not to tell you that your reputation in it is absolutely lost."

"I have no accounts to render to any one."

"Except to your friend the commissary of police, however."

A pale smile flitted across her lips. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "he knows the truth."

"You have seen him again, then?"

"Several times."

"Since we have known each other?"

"Yes."

"And you never told me anything about it?"

"I did not think it necessary."

Maxence said no more ; but, by the sharp pang that he felt, he realized how dear Mademoiselle Lucienne had become to him. "She has secrets from me," thought he, "from me who would deem it a crime to have any from her."

What secrets had she concealed from him that she was pursuing an object which had become, as it were, that of her whole life? Had she not told him, that with the assistance of her friend the commissary, she hoped to penetrate the mystery of her birth, and to revenge herself on the villains, who, three times, had attempted to do away with her? She had never spoken of her projects again ; but it was evident that she had not abandoned them, for she would at the same moment have given up her drives in the Bois, which were to her an abominable torment. But passion can neither reason nor discuss. "She mistrusts me, who would give my life for her," repeated Maxence. And the idea was so painful to him that he resolved to clear his doubts at any cost, preferring the worst misery to the anxiety which was gnawing at his heart.

So soon as he found himself again alone with Lucienne, arming himself with all his courage, and looking her straight in the eyes, "You never speak to me now of your enemies?" he said.

She doubtless understood what was passing within him. "It's because I don't hear anything of them myself," she answered gently.

"Then you have given up your purpose?"

"Not at all."

"What are your hopes, then, and what are your prospects?"

"Extraordinary as it may seem to you, I must confess that I know nothing about it. My friend the commissary has his plan, I am certain ; and he is following it with an indefatigable obstinacy. I am but an instrument in his hands. I never do anything without consulting him ; and what he advises me to do I do."

Maxence started from his chair. "Was it he, then," he asked in a tone of bitter irony, "who suggested to you the idea of our fraternal association?"

A frown appeared upon the girl's countenance. She evidently felt hurt by the tone of this species of interrogatory. "At least he did not disapprove of it," she replied.

But that answer was just evasive enough to excite Maxence's anxiety. "Was it from him too," he went on, "that came the lovely idea of having me obtain a situation in the Mutual Credit Bank?"

"Yes, it was from him."

"For what purpose?"

"He did not explain."

"Why did you not tell me?"

"Because he requested me not to do so."

From being red at the start, Maxence had now become very pale. "And so," he resumed, "it is this man, this police-agent, who is the real arbiter of my destiny ; and if to-morrow he commanded you to break with me—"

Mademoiselle Lucienne drew herself up. "Enough !" she interrupted in a brief tone, "enough ! There is not in my whole existence a single act which would give to my bitterest enemy the right to suspect my loyalty ; and now you accuse me of the basest treason. What have you to reproach me with? Have I not been faithful to the pact sworn between us. Have I not always been for you the best of comrades and the most devoted of friends? I kept silence because the man in whom I have the fullest con-

fidence requested me to do so; but he knew, that, if you questioned me, I would speak; I told him so. Did you question me? And now what more do you want? That I should stoop to quiet the suspicions of your morbid mind? That I will never do."

She was not, perhaps, entirely right; but Maxence was certainly wrong. He acknowledged it, wept, implored her pardon, which was granted, and this explanation only served to rivet more closely the fetters that bound him. It is true, that, availing himself of the permission that had been granted him, he kept himself constantly informed of Mademoiselle Lucienne's doings. He learnt from her that her friend the commissary had held a most minute investigation at Louveciennes, and that the footman who went to the Bois with her now was in reality a detective. And at last, one day, she said: "My friend the commissary thinks he is on the right track now."

XXX.

SUCH was the exact situation of Maxence and Lucienne on that eventful Saturday evening in the month of April, 1872, when the police came to arrest M. Vincent Favoral on the charge of embezzlement and forgery. It will be remembered how, at his mother's request, Maxence had spent the night in the Rue St. Gilles, and how the next morning, unable any longer to resist his eager desire to see Mademoiselle Lucienne, he had started for the Hôtel des Folies, leaving his sister alone at home. He retired to his room, and, sinking into his arm-chair in a fit of the deepest distress. "What will Lucienne say," thought Maxence, when she learns "the horrible truth?" And he felt a cold perspiration on his forehead when he remembered her pride, and that honour was her only faith, the safety-plank to which she had desperately clung in the midst of the storms of her life. What if she should leave him now that the name he bore was disgraced!

A rapid and light step on the landing chased away his gloomy thoughts. Almost immediately the door opened, and Mademoiselle Lucienne appeared. She must have dressed in haste, for she was just finishing hooking her dress, the simplicity of which seemed studied, so marvellously did it set off the elegance of her figure, the slimness of her waist, and the rare perfections of her shoulders and of her neck. A look of intense dissatisfaction overshadowed her lovely features: but as soon as she had seen Maxence, her countenance changed. And, in fact, his air of utter distress, the disorder of his garments, his livid paleness, and the sinister look of his eyes, showed plainly enough that a great misfortune had befallen him. In a voice the agitation of which betrayed something more than the anxiety and the sympathy of a friend, the young girl inquired: "What is the matter? What has happened to you?"

"A terrible misfortune," he replied. He hesitated; he wished to tell everything at once, but knew not how to begin. "I have told you," he resumed, "that my family was very rich."

"Yes."

"Well, we have nothing left, absolutely nothing."

She seemed to breathe more freely, and in a tone of friendly irony, "And it is the loss of your fortune," she said, "that distresses you thus?"

He raised himself painfully to his feet, and in a low hoarse voice, "My honour is lost too," he uttered.

"Honour?"

"Yes. My father has stolen; my father has forged!"

She had become whiter than her collar. "Your father!" she stammered.

"Yes. For years he has been using the money that was intrusted to him, until the deficit now amounts to twelve millions."

"Great heavens!"

"And, notwithstanding the enormity of that sum, he was reduced during the latter months to the most miserable expedients, going from door to door in the neighbourhood, soliciting deposits, until he actually basely swindled a poor newspaper-vendor out of five hundred francs."

"Why, this is madness! And how did you find it out?"

"Last night they came to arrest him. Fortunately we had been warned; and I helped him to escape through a window of my sister's room, which opens on to the court-yard of an adjoining house."

"And where is he now?"

"No one knows."

"Had he any money?"

"Everybody thinks that he carried off millions. I do not believe it. He even refused to take the few thousand francs which M. de Thaller had brought him to facilitate his flight."

Lucienne shuddered. "Did you see M. de Thaller?" she asked.

"He came to the house a few moments before the commissary of police, and a terrible scene took place between him and my father."

"What did he say?"

"That my father had ruined him."

"And your father?"

"He stammered incoherent phrases. He was like a man who has received a stunning blow. But we have discovered incredible things. My father, so austere and so parsimonious at home, led a merry life elsewhere, spending money without stint. It was for a woman that he robbed."

"And—do you know who that woman is?"

"No. But I can find out from the writer of the article in this paper, who says that he knows her. See!"

Mademoiselle Lucienne took the paper which Maxence offered her; but she hardly condescended to look at it. "But what's your idea now?" she asked.

"I do not believe that my father is innocent; but I believe that there are people more guilty than he, skilful and prudent knaves, who have made use of him as a man of straw, villains who will quietly digest their share of the millions, the biggest one, of course, while he will be sent to prison."

A fugitive blush coloured Mademoiselle Lucienne's cheeks. "That being the case," she interrupted, "what do you intend to do?"

"Avenge my father, if possible, and deliver to justice his accomplices, if he has any."

She held out her hand to him. "That's right," she said. "But how will you set about it?"

"I don't know yet. At any rate, I will first of all run to the newspaper office, and obtain the woman's address."

But Mademoiselle Lucienne stopped him. "No," she uttered, "it isn't there that you must go. You must come with me to see my friend the commissary."

Maxence received this suggestion with a gesture of surprise, almost of terror. "Why, how can you think of such a thing?" he exclaimed. "My father is fleeing from justice; and you want me to take for my confidant a

commissary of police, the very man whose duty it is to arrest him, if he can find him!" But he interrupted himself for a moment, staring and gaping, as if the truth had suddenly flashed upon his mind with dazzling evidence. "For my father has not gone abroad," he resumed. "It is in Paris that he is hiding; I am sure of it; you have seen him."

Mademoiselle Lucienne really thought that Maxence was losing his mind. "I have seen your father—I?" she said.

"Yes, last night. How could I have forgotten it? While you were waiting for me down stairs, between eleven and half-past eleven, a slim, middle-aged man, wearing a long overcoat, came and asked for me."

"Yes, I remember."

"He spoke to you in the court-yard."

"That's true."

"What did he say to you?"

She hesitated for a moment, evidently trying to tax her memory. "Nothing," she replied, "that he had not already said before the Fortins; that he wanted to see you on important business, and was sorry not to find you in. What surprised me, though, is that he was speaking as if he knew me, and knew that I was a friend of yours." Then, striking her forehead, "Perhaps you are right," she continued. "Perhaps that man was indeed your father. Wait a minute. Yes, he seemed quite excited, and at every moment he looked round towards the door. He said it would be impossible for him to return, but that he would write to you, and that probably he would require your assistance and your services."

"You see," exclaimed Maxence, excitedly, "it was my father. He is going to write, to return, perhaps; and, under the circumstances, to apply to a commissary of police would be sheer folly, almost treason."

She shook her head. "So much the more reason," she said, "why you should follow my advice. Have you ever had occasion to repent doing so?"

"No; but you may be mistaken."

"I am not mistaken."

She expressed herself in a tone of such absolute certainty, that Maxence, in the disorder of his mind, was at a loss to know what to imagine, what to believe. "You must have some reasons to urge me thus," he said.

"I have."

"Why not tell them to me then?"

"Because I should have no proofs to furnish you of my assertions. Because I should have to go into details which you would not understand. Because, above all, I am following one of those inexplicable presentiments which never deceive."

"Think of my agony," Maxence said, "if I were to cause my father's arrest."

"Would my own be less? Can any misfortune strike you without reaching me? Let us reason a little. What were you saying a moment since? That certainly your father is not as guilty as people think; at any rate, that he is not alone guilty; that he has been but the instrument of rascals more skilful and more powerful than himself; and that he has had but a small share of the twelve millions?"

"Such is my conviction."

"And that you would like to deliver up to justice the villains who have benefited by your father's crime, and who think themselves sure of impunity?"

"I would give anything to be able to do so."

"Well, how will you manage it, alone as you are, perhaps suspected also, without any one to advise you, without friends, without money?"

Tears of rage fell from Maxence's eyes. "Do you wish to take away all my courage?" he murmured.

"No; but I wish to prove to you the necessity of the step which I advise you to take. The end justifies the means; and we have not the choice of means. Come, it is to an honest man and a tried friend that I shall take you. Fear nothing. If he remembers that he is a commissary of police, it will be to serve us, not to injure you. You hesitate? Perhaps at this moment he already knows more than we do ourselves."

Maxence gave way. "Very well," he said, "let us go."

In less than five minutes they were off; and as they went out, they had to disturb Madame Fortin, who stood at the door, gossiping with two or three of the neighbouring shopkeepers. As soon as Maxence and Mademoiselle Lucienne were out of hearing, "You see that young man," said the worthy proprietress of the Hôtel des Folies to her friends. "Well, he is the son of that famous cashier who has just run off with twelve millions, after ruining a thousand families. You think that it troubles him? Not at all. There he is, going out to spend a pleasant day with his mistress, and to treat her to a fine dinner with the old man's money."

Meantime, Maxence and Lucienne reached the commissary's house. He was at home; they walked in, and as soon as they appeared, he said: "I expected you."

He was a man already past middle age, but still active and vigorous. With his white cravat, his long frock-coat and his gaiters, he looked like a notary. Benign was the expression of his countenance; but the lustre of his little grey eyes and the mobility of his nostrils showed that it should not be trusted too far.

"Yes, I expected you," he repeated, addressing himself as much to Maxence as to Mademoiselle Lucienne. "It is the Mutual Credit Bank matter which brings you here?"

Maxence stepped forward. "I am Vincent Favoral's son, sir," he said. "I have still my mother and a sister. Our situation is horrible. Mademoiselle Lucienne suggested that you might be willing to give me some advice; and here we are."

The commissary rang, and on the bell being answered, "I am in for no one," he said. Then turning to Maxence, "Mademoiselle Lucienne did well to bring you," he said; "for it may be, that, whilst rendering her an important service, I may also render you one. But I have no time to lose. Sit down and tell me all about it."

With the most scrupulous exactness Maxence related the history of his family, and the events of the past twenty-four hours. Not once did the commissary interrupt him; but, when he had done, "Tell me all that took place at your father's interview with M. de Thaller over again," he said; "and, especially do not omit anything that you heard or saw, not a word, not a gesture, not a look." Maxence complied.

"Now," resumed the commissary, "repeat everything your father said at the moment of leaving."

He did so. The commissary took a few notes, and then, "What were," he inquired, "the relations of your family with the De Thaller family?"

"There were none."

"What! Neither Madame nor Mademoiselle de Thaller ever visited you?"

"Never."

"Do you know the Marquis de Trégars?"

Maxence stared in surprise. "Trégars!" he repeated. "It's the first time that I hear the name."

The persons usually having dealings with the commissary would have hesitated to recognize him, so completely had he set aside his professional stiffness, so much had his freezing reserve given way to the most encouraging kindness. "Well, then," he resumed, "never mind M. de Trégars; but let us talk of the woman who you seem to think has been the cause of M. Favoral's ruin."

On the table before him lay a number of the paper in which Maxence had read in the morning the terrible article headed: "Another Financial Disaster." "I know nothing of the woman," replied Maxence; "but it must be easy to find out, since the writer of this article pretends to know her."

The commissary smiled, not having quite as much faith in newspapers as Maxence seemed to have. "Yes I read that," he said.

"We might send to the office of the paper," suggested Mademoiselle Lucienne.

"I have already sent, my child." And, without seeming to notice the surprise of Maxence and of the young girl he rang the bell, and asked whether his secretary had returned. The secretary answered by appearing in person. "Well?" inquired the commissary.

"I have attended to the matter, sir," he replied. "I saw the reporter who wrote the article in question; and after beating about the bush for some time, he finally confessed that he knew nothing more than had been published, and that he had obtained his information from two intimate friends of the cashier, M. Costeclar and M. Saint-Pavin."

"You should have gone to see those gentlemen."

"I did."

"Very well. What then?"

"Unfortunately, M. Costeclar had just gone out. As to M. Saint-Pavin I found him at the office of his paper, 'The Financial Pilot.' He is a coarse and vulgar personage, and received me like a hound. I had even a mind to—"

"Never mind that! Go on."

"He was closeted with another gentleman, a banker named Jottras, of the firm of Jottras and Brother. They were both in a terrible rage, swearing like troopers, and saying that the Favoral defalcation would ruin them; that they had been taken in like fools, but that they were not going to take things so easy, and that they would write a crushing article." But he suddenly stopped, and with a wink indicated Maxence and Mademoiselle Lucienne, who were listening as attentively as they could.

"Speak, speak!" said the commissary. "It is all right."

"Well," he resumed, "M. Saint-Pavin and M. Jottras were saying that M. Favoral was only a poor dupe, but that they would know how to find the others."

"What others?"

"Ah! they didn't say."

The commissary shrugged his shoulders. "What!" he exclaimed, "you find yourself in the presence of two men furious at having been duped, who swear and threaten, and you can't even get from them a name that you want? You are not very sharp my friend!" And as the poor secretary all out of countenance looked on the ground and said nothing, "Did you at

least ask them," he inquired, "who the woman is to whom the article refers, and whose existence they have revealed to the reporter?"

"Of course I did, sir."

"And what did they answer?"

"That they were not spies and had nothing to say. M. Saint-Pavin added, however, that he had said it without much thought, because he had once seen M. Favoral buying a bracelet worth three thousand francs, and also because it seemed impossible to him that a man should do away with millions without the aid of a woman."

The commissary could not conceal his ill humour. "Of course!" he grumbled. "Since Solomon said, 'Look for the woman' for it was King Solomon who first said it, every fool thinks it smart to repeat with a cunning look that most obvious of truths. What next?"

"M. Saint-Pavin politely invited me to go to—well, not here."

The commissary rapidly wrote a few lines, put them in an envelope which he sealed with his private seal, and handed it to his secretary saying: "That will do. Take this to the Préfecture yourself." And, after the secretary had gone, "Well, M. Maxence," he said, "you have heard?"

Of course he had. Only Maxence was thinking much less of what he had just heard than of the strange interest this commissary had taken in his affairs, even before he had seen him. "I think," he stammered, "that it is very unfortunate the woman cannot be found."

With a gesture full of confidence, "Be easy," said the commissary; "she will be found. A woman cannot swallow millions at that rate without attracting attention. Believe me we shall find her, unless—" He paused for a moment, and speaking slowly and emphatically, he added: "Unless, she is backed up by a very skilful and very prudent man. Or is in such a position that her extravagance has not created any scandal."

Mademoiselle Lucienne started. She fancied she understood the commissary's thoughts, and could catch a glimpse of the truth. "Good heavens!" she murmured.

But Maxence didn't notice anything, his mind being wholly bent upon following the commissary's deductions. "Or unless," he said, "my father has received almost nothing for his share of the enormous sums embezzled from the Mutual Credit Bank, in which case he can have given relatively but little to this woman. M. Saint-Pavin himself acknowledges that my father has been egregiously taken in."

"By whom?"

Maxence hesitated for a moment. "I think," he said at last, "and several friends of my family, among them M. Chapelain an old lawyer, think as I do, that it is very strange that my father should have stolen millions from the Mutual Credit Bank without the manager knowing anything of it."

"Then, according to you M. de Thaller is an accomplice?" Maxence made no answer. "Be it so," insisted the commissary. "I admit M. de Thaller's complicity; but then we must suppose that he had over your father some powerful means of action."

"An employer always possesses a great deal of influence over his subordinates."

"An influence sufficiently powerful to make them run the risk of penal servitude for his benefit? That is not likely. You must try and imagine something else."

"I am trying; but I don't find anything."

"And yet that is not all. How do you explain your father's silence when M. de Thaller was heaping upon him the most outrageous insults?"

"My father was stunned, as it were."

"And at the moment of escaping, if he did have any accomplices, how is it that he did not mention their names to you, to your mother, or to your sister?"

"Because, doubtless he had no proofs to offer of their complicity."

"Would you have asked him for any?"

"O sir!"

"Therefore such is not evidently the motive of his silence; and it might better be attributed to some secret hope that he still had left."

"However, the commissary now had all the information, which voluntarily or otherwise, Maxence was able to give him. He rose, and in the kindest tone, said to him: "You came to ask me for advice. Here it is: Say nothing, and wait. Allow justice and the police to pursue their work. Whatever may be your suspicions hide them. I will do for you as I would for Lucienne, whom I love as if she were my own child, for it so happens, that in helping you I shall help her."

He could not prevent himself from laughing at the astonishment, which at those words depicted itself upon Maxence's face; and gaily added: "You don't understand. Well, never mind. It is not necessary that you should."

XXXI.

Two o'clock struck as Mademoiselle Lucienne and Maxence left the office of the commissary of police, she pensive and agitated, he gloomy and irritated. They reached the Hôtel des Folies without exchanging a word. Madame Fortin was again at the door, speechifying in the midst of a group with indefatigable volubility. Indeed, it was a perfect godsend for her, the fact of lodging the son of the cashier who had stolen twelve millions, and had thus suddenly become a celebrity. Seeing Maxence and Mademoiselle Lucienne coming, she stepped towards them, and, with her most obsequious smile, "Back already?" she said.

But they made no answer; and, entering the narrow passage, they hurried to their fourth story. As he entered his room, Maxence threw his hat upon the bed with a gesture of impatience; and, after walking up and down for a moment, he returned to plant himself in front of Mademoiselle Lucienne. "Well," he asked, "are you satisfied now?"

She looked at him with an air of profound commiseration, knowing his weakness too well to be angry at his injustice. "Of what should I be satisfied?" she asked gently.

"I have done what you wished me to do."

"You did what reason dictated, my friend."

"Very well, we won't quarrel about words. I have seen your friend the commissary. Am I any better off?"

She shrugged her shoulders almost imperceptibly. "What did you expect of him, then?" she asked. "Did you think that he could undo what is done? Did you suppose, that, by the sole power of his will, he would make up the deficit in the cash of the Mutual Credit Bank, and rehabilitate your father?"

"No, I am not quite mad yet."

"Well, then, could he do more than promise you his most ardent and devoted co-operation?"

But he did not allow her to proceed. "And how do I know," he exclaimed, "that he is not trifling with me? If he was sincere, why his reticence and his enigmas? He pretends that I may rely on him, because to serve me is to serve you. What does that mean? What connection is there between your situation and mine, between your enemies and those of my father? And I—I replied to all his questions like a simpleton. Poor fool! But the man who drowns catches at straws; and I am drowning, I am sinking, I am foundering." He sank upon a chair, and, hiding his face in his hands, "Ah, how I suffer!" he groaned.

Mademoiselle Lucienne approached him, and in a severe tone, despite her emotion, she exclaimed: "Are you, then, such a coward? What! at the first misfortune that strikes you—and this is the first real misfortune of your life, Maxence—you despair! An obstacle rises, and, instead of gathering all your energy to overcome it, you sit down and weep like a woman! Who, then, is to inspire courage in your mother and in your sister, if you give up thus?"

At the sound of these words, uttered by that voice which was all-powerful over his soul, Maxence looked up. "I thank you, my friend," he said. "I thank you for reminding me of what I owe to my mother and sister. Poor women! They are wondering, doubtless, what has become of me."

"You must return to them," interrupted the young girl.

He got up resolutely. "I will," he replied. "I should be unworthy of you if I could not raise my own energy to the level of yours." And, having pressed her hand, he went out.

But it was not by the usual route that he reached the Rue St. Gilles. He made a long detour, so as not to meet any of his acquaintances. "Here you are at last," said the servant as she opened the door. "Madame was getting very uneasy, I can tell you. She is in the drawing-room with Mademoiselle Gilberte and M. Chapelain."

It was so. After his fruitless attempt to reach M. de Thaller, M. Chapelain had lunched at Madame Favoral's, and had remained, wishing, he said, to see Maxence. And as soon as the young man appeared, availing himself of the privileges of his age and a long acquaintance, he asked him: "How dare you leave your mother and sister alone in a house where some brutal creditor may come in at any moment?"

"I was wrong," said Maxence, who preferred to plead guilty rather than attempt an explanation.

"Don't do it again then," resumed M. Chapelain. "I was waiting for you to say that I was unable to see M. de Thaller, and that I do not care to face once more the impudence of his valets. You will, therefore, have to take back the fifteen thousand francs he brought your father. Place them in his own hands mind, and don't give them up without a receipt."

After some further recommendations he went off, leaving Madame Favoral alone at last with her children. She was about to call Maxence to account for his absence, when Mademoiselle Gilberte interrupted her. "I have to speak to you, mother," she said with singular precipitation, "and to you also, brother." And at once she began telling them of M. Costeclar's strange visit, his inconceivable audacity, and his offensive declarations.

Maxence was fairly stamping with rage. "And I was not here," he exclaimed, "to kick him out of the house!"

But another was there; and this was just what Mademoiselle Gilberte wished to come to. But the avowal was difficult, painful even; and it was not without some degree of confusion that she resumed at last, "You have suspected for a long time, mother, that I was hiding something from you. When you questioned me, I lied; not that I had anything to blush for, but because I feared for you my father's anger."

Her mother and her brother were gazing at her with a look of blank amazement.

"Yes, I had a secret," she continued. "Boldly, without consulting any one, trusting the sole inspirations of my heart, I had engaged my life to a stranger; I had selected the man whose wife I wished to be."

Madame Favoral raised her hands to heaven. "But this is sheer madness!" she said.

"Unfortunately," went on the girl, "between that man, my affianced husband before God, and myself rose a terrible obstacle. He was poor: he thought my father very rich; and he asked me for a delay of three years to conquer a fortune which might enable him to aspire to my hand." She stopped; all the blood in her veins was rushing to her face. "This morning," she resumed, "at the news of our disaster, he came—"

"Here?" interrupted Maxence.

"Yes, brother, here. He arrived at the very moment, when, basely insulted by M. Costeclar, I had commanded him to withdraw, but who, instead of going, was walking towards me with outstretched arms."

"He dared to enter here!" murmured Madame Favoral.

"Yes, mother, he came in just in time to seize M. Costeclar by his coat-collar, and to throw him at my feet, livid with fear, and begging for mercy. He came, notwithstanding the terrible calamity that has befallen us, notwithstanding the ruin and the shame, he came to offer me his name, and to tell me, that, in the course of the day, he would send a friend of his family to apprise you of his intentions."

Here she was interrupted by the servant, who, opening the door, announced: "The Count de Villegré."

If it had occurred to Madame Favoral or Maxence that Mademoiselle Gilberte might have been the victim of some base intrigue, the mere appearance of the man who now entered the room must have been sufficient to disabuse them. He was of a rather formidable aspect, with his military bearing, his bluff manners, his huge white moustaches, and the deep scar on his forehead. But in order to be re-assured, and to feel confident, it was enough to look at his broad face, at once energetic and debonair, his clear eyes, in which shone the loyalty of his soul, and his thick red lips, which had never opened to utter an untruth. At this moment, however, he was hardly himself. This valiant man, this old soldier, was timid; and he would have felt much more at ease under the fire of a battery than in that humble drawing-room in the Rue St. Gilles, under the uneasy glances of Maxence and Madame Favoral. Having bowed, he remained standing, hat in hand, two steps from the door. Eloquence was not his forte. He had learnt his lesson in advance; but though he kept coughing and trying to clear his throat, the beginning of his speech stuck there.

Seeing how urgent it was to come to his assistance, Mademoiselle Gilberte said: "I was expecting you, sir."

With this encouragement, he advanced towards Madame Favoral and bowed low. "I see that my presence surprises you, madame," he began; "and I must confess that—hum!—it does not surprise me less than it does

you. But extraordinary circumstances require exceptional action. On any other occasion, I would not fall amongst you like a bombshell. But we had no time to waste in ceremonious formalities. I will, therefore, ask your leave to introduce myself: I am General Count de Villegré."

Maxence handed him a chair. "I am ready to hear you, sir," said Madame Favoral.

He sat down, and with a further effort. "I suppose, madame," he resumed, "that your daughter has explained to you our singular situation, which, as I had the honour of telling you—hum!—is not strictly in accordance with social usage."

Mademoiselle Gilberte interrupted him. "When you came in, count, I was only just beginning to explain the facts to my mother and brother."

The old soldier made a gesture, which showed plainly that he did not much relish the prospect of having to make a somewhat difficult explanation. "It is very simple," he said; "I come in behalf of M. de Trégars."

Maxence fairly bounded upon his chair. That was the very name which he had just heard mentioned by the commissary of police. "Trégars!" he repeated in a tone of immense surprise.

"Yes," said M. de Villegré. "Do you know him, by chance?"

"No, sir, no!"

"Marius de Trégars is the son of the most honest man I ever knew, of the best friend I ever had, of the Marquis de Trégars, in a word, who died of grief a few years ago, after—hum!—some quite inexplicable—broum!—reverses of fortune. Marius could not be dearer to me, if he were my own son. He has lost his parents, I have no relatives; and I have transferred to him all the feelings of affection which still remain at the bottom of my old heart. And I can say that never was a man more worthy of affection. I know him. To the most legitimate pride and the most scrupulous integrity, he unites a keen and supple mind, and wit enough to get the better of the toughest rascal. He has no fortune for the reason that—hum!—he gave up all he had to certain pretended creditors of his father. But whenever he wishes to be rich, he shall be; and—broum!—he may be so before long. I know his projects, his hopes, his resources." But, as if feeling that he was treading on dangerous ground, the Count de Villegré stopped short, and after taking breath for a moment, he resumed: "In short, Marius has been unable to see Mademoiselle Gilberte, and to appreciate the rare qualities of her heart, without falling desperately in love with her."

Madame Favoral made a gesture of protest. "Allow me, sir," she began.

But he interrupted her. "I understand you, madame," he said. "You wonder how M. de Trégars can have seen your daughter, have known her, and have appreciated her, without your seeing or hearing anything of it. Nothing is more simple, and if I may venture to say—hum!—more natural."

And the worthy old soldier began to explain to Madame Favoral the meetings in the Place Royale, his conversations with Marius, intended really for Mademoiselle Gilberte, and the part he had consented to play in this little comedy. But he became embarrassed in his sentences, he multiplied his hums and his broums in the most alarming manner; and his explanations explained nothing. Mademoiselle Gilberte took pity on him; and kindly interrupting him, she herself told her story, and that of Marius. She told of the pledge they had exchanged, how they had seen each other twice, and how they constantly heard of each other through the very innocent and very unconscious Signor Gismondo Pulci. Maxence and Madame Favoral were amazed. They would have absolutely refused to believe such a

story, had it not been told by Mademoiselle Gilberte herself. "Ah, my dear sister!" thought Maxence, "who could have suspected such a thing, seeing you always so calm and so meek!" "Is it possible," Madame Favoral was saying to herself, "that I can have been so blind and so deaf!" As to the Count de Villegré, he would have tried in vain to express the gratitude he felt towards Mademoiselle Gilberte for having spared him these difficult explanations. "I could not have done half as well myself!" he thought, like a man who has no illusions on his own account.

But as soon as Gilberte had finished speaking he said to Madame Favoral, "Now, madame, you know all; and you will understand that the irreparable disaster that strikes you has removed the only obstacle which hitherto stood in my friend's way." He then rose, and in a solemn tone, without any hum or broum, this time, uttered these words: "I have the honour, madame, to solicit the hand of Mademoiselle Gilberte, your daughter, for my friend Yves-Marius de Genost, Marquis de Trégars."

A profound silence followed his speech. But this silence the Count de Villegré doubtless interpreted in his own favour; for he opened the door and called, "Marius!" Marius de Trégars had foreseen all that had just taken place, and had so informed the Count de Villegré in advance. Being given Madame Favoral's disposition, he knew what could be expected of her; and he had his own reasons to fear nothing from Maxence. And if he mistrusted somewhat the diplomatic talents of his ambassador, he relied absolutely upon Mademoiselle Gilberte's energy. And so confident was he of the correctness of his calculations, that he had insisted upon accompanying his old friend, so as to be on hand at the critical moment. When the servant opened the door to them, he asked her to introduce M. de Villegré, stating that he would himself wait in the dining-room. This arrangement had not seemed entirely natural to the girl; but so many strange things had happened in the house for the past twenty-four hours, that she was prepared for anything. Besides, recognizing Marius as the gentleman who had had a violent altercation in the morning with M. Costeclar, she did as he requested, and leaving him alone in the dining-room, went to attend to her duties. He had taken a seat, impassive in appearance, but in reality agitated by that internal trepidation of which the strongest men cannot free themselves in the decisive moments of their existence. To a certain extent, the prospects of his whole life were to be decided on the other side of the door which had just closed behind the Count de Villegré. To the success of his love, other interests were united which required immediate success. And counting the seconds by the beatings of his heart, "How very slow they are!" he thought. So when the door opened at last, and his old friend called him, he jumped to his feet, and collecting all his coolness and self-possession he walked in.

Maxence had risen to receive him; but when he saw him he stepped back his eyes staring in utter surprise. "Ah, great heavens!" he muttered in a smothered voice.

But M. de Trégars seemed not to notice his surprise. Quite self-possessed, notwithstanding his emotion, he examined with a rapid glance the Count de Villegré, Madame Favoral, and Mademoiselle Gilberte. At their attitude, and at the expression of their countenance, he easily guessed the point to which things had come; and advancing towards Madame Favoral, he bowed with an amount of respect which was certainly not put on. "You have heard the Count de Villegré, madame," he said in a slightly altered tone of voice. "I am awaiting my fate."

The poor woman had never before in her life been so fearfully perplexed. All these events which succeeded each other so rapidly, had broken the feeble springs of her mind. She was utterly incapable of collecting her thoughts, or of taking a determination. "At this moment, sir," she stammered, "taken unawares, it would be impossible for me to answer you. Grant me a few days for reflection. We have some old friends whom I ought to consult."

But Maxence who had recovered his self-possession, interrupted her. "Friends, mother!" he exclaimed. "And who are they? People in our position have no friends. What! when we are perishing, a man of heart holds out his hand to us, and you ask for time to reflect? To my sister who bears a name henceforth disgraced, the Marquis de Trégars offers his name, and you think of consulting—"

The poor woman was shaking her head. "I am not the mistress, my son," she murmured; "your father—"

"My father!" interrupted the young man, "my father! What rights can he have over us hereafter?" And without further discussion, without awaiting an answer, he led his sister to M. de Trégars saying. "Ah! take her, sir. Never, whatever she may do, will she acquit the debt of eternal gratitude which we this day contract towards you."

A tremor that shook their frames, a lingering look which they exchanged, alone betrayed the lover's feelings. They had a too cruel experience of life not to mistrust their joy. Returning to Madame Favoral, Marius said: "You do not understand, madame, why I should have selected for such a step the very moment when an irreparable calamity befalls you. One word will explain all: Being in a position to serve you, I wished to acquire the right of doing so."

Fixing upon him a look full of the gloomiest despair, "Alas!" the poor woman murmured, "what can you do for me, sir? My life is ended. I have but one wish left—to know where my husband is. It is not for me to judge him. He has not procured me the happiness which I had, perhaps, the right to expect; but he is my husband, he is unhappy; my duty is to join him wherever he may be, and to share his sufferings."

She was interrupted by the servant calling: "Madame, madame!"

"What is the matter?" inquired Maxence.

"I must speak to madame at once."

Making an effort to rise and walk, Madame Favoral left the room. She was gone but a minute; and, when she returned, her agitation had further increased. "It is the hand of Providence, perhaps," she said. The others were all looking at her anxiously. She took a seat, and, addressing herself more especially to M. de Trégars, she resumed in a feeble voice: "This is what happens. M. Favoral was in the habit of always changing his coat as soon as he came home. As usual, he did so last evening. When they came to arrest him, he forgot to change again, and went off with the coat he had on. The other remained hanging in the room, and the girl took it just now to brush it and put it away. This pocket-book, which my husband always carried about with him, fell out of the pocket."

It was an old Russian leather pocket-book which had once been red, but which time and use had turned black. It was full of papers.

"Perhaps, indeed," exclaimed Maxence, "we may find some information here." He opened it, and had already taken out three-fourths of its contents without finding anything of any consequence, when suddenly he uttered an exclamation. He had just unfolded an anonymous note, evi-

dently written in a disguised hand, and at one glance had read : " I cannot understand your negligence. You should get that Van-Klopen matter over. There is the danger."

" What is that note ? " inquired M. de Trégars.

Maxence handed it to him. " Look ! " said he ; " but you will not understand the immense interest it has for me."

But having read it, " You are mistaken," said Marius. " I understand perfectly ; and I'll prove it to you."

The next moment Maxence found in the pocket-book, and read aloud the following bill, dated two days before. " Sold to——two leather trunks with patent locks at 220 francs each ; total 440 francs."

M. de Trégars started. " At last," he said, " here is doubtless one end of the thread which will guide us to the truth through this labyrinth of iniquities." And, laying his hand on Maxence's shoulder, he added : " We must talk over this, and at length. To-morrow, before you go to M. de Thaller's with his fifteen thousand francs, call and see me, I shall expect you. We are now engaged upon a common work ; and something tells me, that, before long, we shall know what has become of the millions of the Mutual Credit Bank."

PART II.

FISHING IN TROUBLED WATERS.

I.

"WHEN I think," said Coleridge, "that every morning, in Paris alone, thirty thousand fellows wake up, and rise with the fixed and settled idea of appropriating other people's money, it is with renewed wonder that every night, when I reach home, I find my purse still in my pocket."

And yet it is not those who simply aim to steal your purse who are either the most dishonest or the most formidable. To stand at the corner of some dark street, and rush upon the first person who comes along, demanding, "Your money, or your life," is but a poor business, devoid of all prestige, and long since given up to chivalrous natures. A man must be something worse than a simpleton to still ply his trade on the high-roads, exposed to all sorts of annoyances on the part of the police, when manufacturing and financial enterprises offer such a magnificently fertile field to the activity of imaginative people. And, in order to thoroughly understand the mode of proceeding in this particular field, it is sufficient to open from time to time a copy of the "Gazette des Tribunaux," and to read some trial like that, for instance, of one Lefurteux, ex-managing-director of the "Company for the Drainage and Improvement of the Swamps of the Department of the Orne."

This took place less than a month ago, in one of the criminal courts."

THE JUDGE TO THE ACCUSED.—"Your profession?"

M. LEFURTEUX.—"Managing-director of the company."

QUESTION.—"Before that what were you doing?"

ANSWER.—"I speculated on the Bourse."

Q.—"You had no means?"

A.—"Excuse me, I was making money."

Q.—"And it was under such circumstances that you had the audacity to organize a company with a capital of three millions of francs, divided into shares of five hundred francs each?"

A.—"Having discovered an idea, I did not suppose that I was forbidden to make use of it."

Q.—"What do you call an idea?"

A.—"The idea of draining swamps, and making them productive."

Q.—"What swamps? Yours never had any existence, except in your prospectus."

A.—"I expected to buy some as soon as my capital was paid up."

Q.—"And in the meantime you promised ten per cent to your shareholders?"

A.—"That's the least that draining operations ever pay."

Q.—"You have advertised?"

A.—"Of course."

Q.—"To what extent?"

A.—“To the extent of about sixty thousand francs.”

Q.—“Where did you obtain the money?”

A.—“I commenced with ten thousand francs, which a friend of mine lent me; then I used the funds that came in.”

Q.—“In other words, you made use of the money of your first dupes to attract others?”

A.—“Many people thought it was a good thing.”

Q.—“Who? Those to whom you sent your prospectus with a plan of your fictitious swamps?”

A.—“Excuse me. Others too.”

Q.—“How much money did you receive in all?”

A.—“About six hundred thousand francs, as the expert has stated.”

Q.—“And you have spent the whole of the money?”

A.—“Excuse me, I have never applied to my personal wants anything beyond the salary which was allowed me by the bye-laws.”

Q.—“How is it then, that when you were arrested there were only found in your safe twelve hundred and fifty francs which had been sent you through the post that very morning? What has become of the rest?”

A.—“The rest has been spent for the good of the company.”

Q.—“Of course! You had a carriage?”

A.—“It was allowed me by Article 27 of the bye-laws.”

Q.—“For the good of the company too, I suppose?”

A.—“Certainly. I was compelled to make a certain display. The head of an important company must endeavour to inspire confidence.”

The Judge (with an ironical look).—“Was it also to inspire confidence that you had a mistress, on whom you spent considerable sums of money?”

The accused (in a tone of perfect candour).—“Yes, sir.”

After a pause of a few moments, the judge resumes,—

Q.—“Your offices were magnificent. They must have cost you a great deal to furnish?”

A.—“On the contrary, sir, almost nothing. The furniture was all hired. You can examine the upholsterer.”

The upholsterer is sent for, and in answer to the judge's questions, says: “What M. Lefurteux has stated is true. My specialty is to hire office-furniture for financial and other companies. I supply everything, from the book-keepers' desks to the furniture for the manager's private room; from the iron safe to the servants' livery. In twenty-four hours everything is ready, and the subscribers can come. As soon as a company is organized like the one in question, the promoters call on me and, according to the magnitude of the capital required, I furnish in a more or less costly style. I have a good deal of experience and I know just what's wanted. When M. Lefurteux came to see me I gauged his operation at a glance. Three millions of capital, swamps in the Orne, shares of five hundred francs, small subscribers anxious and noisy. ‘Very well,’ I said to him, ‘it's a six months' job. Don't go into useless expenses. Have repp for your private office: it's quite good enough.’”

The Judge (in a tone of profound surprise).—“You told him that?”

The Upholsterer (in the simple accents of an honest man).—“Exactly as I am telling you, sir. He followed my advice; and I sent him at once the furniture and fixtures of the River Fishery Company, the manager of which had just been sent to prison for three years.”

When, after such revelations renewed from week to week with instructive

variations, purchasers are still found for the shares of the Tiffila Mines, the Bretonèche Lands, and the forests of Formanoir, is it to be wondered at that the Mutual Credit Bank found numerous supporters? It had been admirably started at that propitious hour of the December Coup d'Etat, when the first ideas of mutuality were beginning to penetrate the financial world. It had lacked neither capital nor powerful patronage at the start, and had been at once admitted to the honour of being quoted at the Bourse. Beginning business ostensibly as an accommodation bank for manufacturers and merchants, the Mutual Credit Bank had had for a number of years a well-determined specialty. But gradually it had enlarged the circle of its operations, altered its bye-laws, changed its board of directors; and towards the end the original shareholders would have been not a little embarrassed to tell what was the nature of its business and from what sources it drew its profits. All they knew was, that it always paid respectable dividends; that the manager M. de Thaller was personally very rich; and that they could trust him to steer clear of the criminal courts. There were some, of course, who did not view things in quite so favourable a light; who suggested that the dividends were suspiciously large; that M. de Thaller spent too much money on his house, his wife, his daughter, and his mistresses. One thing is certain, that the shares of the Mutual Credit Bank were much above par, and were quoted at 580 francs on that Saturday, when after the closing of the Bourse the rumour spread that the cashier, Vincent Favoral had decamped with twelve millions. "What a haul!" thought, not without a feeling of envy, more than one broker who for merely one-twelfth of that amount would have gaily crossed the frontier. It was almost an event in Paris. Although such adventures are frequent enough and not taken much notice of, in the present instance the magnitude of the amount more than made up for the vulgarity of the act. Favoral was generally pronounced a very smart man; and some persons declared that to take twelve millions could hardly be called stealing. The first question asked was: "Is De Thaller in the operation? Was he in collusion with his cashier? If he was then the Mutual Credit Bank is better off than ever; if he was not, it is done for." This uncertainty kept up the price for about half-an-hour. But soon the most disastrous news began to spread, brought, no one knew whence or by whom; and there was an irresistible panic. From 435 francs at which price they had maintained themselves for a time, the shares of the Mutual Credit Bank suddenly fell to 300, then 200, and finally to 150 francs. Some friends of M. de Thaller, M. Costeclar, amongst others had endeavoured to keep up the market; but they had soon recognized the futility of their efforts, and then they had bravely commenced doing like the rest.

The next day was Sunday. From the early morning it was reported with the most circumstantial details that the Baron de Thaller had been arrested. But in the evening this had been contradicted by people who had gone to the races, and who had met there Madame de Thaller and her daughter, more brilliant than ever, very lively and very talkative. To the persons who went to speak to them, the baroness said: "My husband was unable to come. He is busy with two of his clerks looking over that poor Favoral's accounts. It seems that they are in the most inconceivable confusion. Who would ever have thought such a thing of a man who lived on bread and nuts? But he operated at the Bourse; and he had organized under a false name a sort of bank in which he very foolishly sunk large sums of money." And with a smile as if all danger had been luckily averted.

"Fortunately," she added, "the damage is not as great as has been reported, and this time again we shall get off with a good fright." But the baroness's speeches were hardly sufficient to quiet the anxiety of the people who felt in their coat-pockets the worthless certificates of the Mutual Credit Bank stock. And the next day, Monday, as early as eight o'clock they began to arrive in crowds to demand of M. de Thaller some sort of an explanation. They were there at least a hundred, huddled together in the vestibule, on the stairs and on the first landing, a prey to the most painful emotion and the most violent excitement; for they had been refused admittance. To all those who insisted upon going in a tall servant in livery, standing before the door replied invariably: "The office is not open, M. de Thaller has not yet come." Whereupon they uttered such terrible threats and such loud imprecations that the frightened concierge had run and hid himself in the darkest corner of his room. No one can imagine to what epileptic contortions the loss of money can drive an assemblage of men, who has not seen a meeting of shareholders on the morrow of a great disaster, with their clenched fists, their convulsed faces, their glaring eyes and foaming lips. They felt indignant at what had once been their delight. They laid the blame of their ruin upon the splendour of the house, the sumptuousness of the stair-case, the candelabras of the vestibule, the carpets, the chairs, everything. "And it is our money too," they cried, "that has paid for all this!" Standing upon a bench a little short man was exciting transports of indignation by describing the magnificence of the Baron de Thaller's residence, where he had once had some dealings. He had counted five carriages in the coach-house, fifteen horses in the stables, and heaven knows how many servants. He had never been inside the apartments, but he had seen the kitchens and he declared that he had been dazzled by the number and brightness of the saucepans ranged in order of size above the stoves.

Gathered in a group in the vestibule the most sensible deplored their rash confidence. "That's the way," concluded one, "with all these adventurous affairs."

"That's a fact. There's nothing after all like government bonds."

"Or a first mortgage on good property, with subrogation of the wife's rights."

But what exasperated them all was not being admitted to the presence of M. de Thaller and seeing the servant mounting guard before the door. "What impudence," they growled, "to leave us on the stairs!—we who are the masters after all."

"Who knows where M. de Thaller may be?"

"He is hiding, of course!"

"No matter, I will see him," clamoured a big fat man, with a brick-coloured face, "if I shouldn't stir from here for a week."

"You'll see nothing at all," giggled his neighbour. "Do you suppose they don't have back-stairs and private entrances in this infernal shop?"

"Ah! if I believed anything of the kind," exclaimed the big man in a voice trembling with passion, "I'd soon break in some of these doors: it isn't so hard, after all."

Already he was gazing at the servant with an alarming air, when an old gentleman with a discreet look stepped up to him, and inquired: "Excuse me, sir, how many shares have you?"

"Three," answered the man with the brick-coloured face.

The other sighed. "I have two hundred and fifty," he said. "That's

why, being at least as interested as yourself in not losing everything, I beg of you to indulge in no violent proceedings."

There was no need of further persuasion. The door which the servant was guarding flew open. A clerk appeared, and made sign that he wished to speak. "Gentlemen," he began, "M. de Thaller has come; but he is just now engaged with the investigating magistrate." Shouts having drowned his voice, he withdrew precipitately.

"If the law gets its finger in," murmured the discreet gentleman, "good-bye!"

"That's a fact," said another. "But we shall have the precious advantage of hearing that dear baron condemned to one year's imprisonment, and a fine of fifty francs. That's the regular rate. He wouldn't get off so cheap if he had stolen a loaf of bread from a baker."

"Do you then believe that story about the magistrate?" roughly interrupted the big man.

They had to believe it when they saw him appear, followed by a commissary of police and a porter, carrying on his back a load of books and papers. They stood aside to let them pass; but there was no time to make any comments, as another clerk appeared immediately and said: "M. de Thaller is ready to receive you, gentlemen. Please walk in."

There was then a terrible jamming and pushing to see who would get first into the directors' room, the door of which stood wide open. M. de Thaller was leaning against the mantle-piece, neither paler nor more excited than usual, but like a man who feels sure of himself and of his means of action. As soon as silence was restored,—“First of all, gentlemen,” he began, “I must tell you that the board of directors is about to meet, and that a general meeting of the shareholders will be called.” Not a murmur. As at the touch of a magician's wand the dispositions of the shareholders seemed to have changed. “I have nothing new to inform you of,” he went on. “What happens is a misfortune, but not a disaster. The first thing to do was to save the company; and I had first thought of making a call for funds—”

“Well,” interrupted two or three timid voices, “if it was absolutely necessary—”

“But there is no need of it—”

“Ah, ah!”

“For I can manage to carry everything through by adding to our reserve fund my own private fortune.”

This time the hurrahs and the bravos drowned his voice. M. de Thaller received them like a man who deserves them, and, more slowly, “Honour commanded it,” he continued. “I confess it, gentlemen, the wretch who has so basely deceived us had my entire confidence. You will understand my apparent blindness when you know with what infernal skill he managed.”

Loud imprecations burst forth on all sides against Vincent Favoral. But the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank proceeded: “For the present, all I have to ask of you is to keep cool, and continue to give me your confidence.”

“Yes, yes!”

“The panic of the night before last was but a stock jobbing manoeuvre, organized by rival establishments, who were in hopes of taking our customers away from us. They will be disappointed, gentlemen. We will triumphantly demonstrate our soundness; and we shall come out of this trial more powerful than ever.”

It was all over. M. de Thaller understood his business. They offered him a vote of thanks. A smile was beaming upon the same faces that were a moment before contracted by rage. One shareholder alone did not seem to share the general enthusiasm : he was no other than our old friend, M. Chapelain, the ex-lawyer. "That fellow de Thaller is just capable of getting himself out of the scrape," he grumbled. "I must tell Maxence."

II.

WE have every species of courage in France, and to a superior degree, except that of braving public opinion. Few men would have dared, like Marius de Trégars, to offer their name to the daughter of a wretch charged with embezzlement and forgery, and that at the very moment when the scandal of the crime was at its height. But, when Marius judged a thing good and just, he did it without troubling himself in the least about what others would think. And so his mere presence in the house of the Rue St. Gilles had brought back hope to its inmates. Of his designs he had said but a few words : "I have the means of helping you ; I intend, by marrying Gilberte, to acquire the right of doing so." But those words had been enough. Madame Favoral and Maxence had understood that the man who spoke thus was one of those cool and resolute men whom nothing disconcerts or discourages, and who know how to make the best of the most perilous situations. And, when he had retired with the Count de Villegré, Mademoiselle Gilberte said to her mother and her brother : "I don't know what he will do ; but he will certainly do something ; and, if it is humanly possible to succeed, he will succeed." And how proudly she spoke thus ! Marius's assistance was the justification of her conduct. She trembled with joy at the thought that it would, perhaps, be to the man whom she had alone and so boldly chosen that her family would owe their salvation. Nodding his head, and making allusion to events of which he kept the secret, Maxence added : "I firmly believe, that, to reach our father's enemies, M. de Trégars possesses some powerful means ; and what they are we will doubtless soon know, since I have an appointment with him for to-morrow morning."

It came at last, that morrow, which he had awaited with an impatience that neither his mother nor his sister could suspect. And towards half-past nine he was ready to go out, when M. Chapelain called. Still irritated by the scenes he had just witnessed at the offices of the Mutual Credit Bank, the old lawyer arrived with a most lugubrious countenance. "I bring bad news," he began. "I have just seen the Baron de Thaller."

He had said so much the day before about having nothing more to do with it, that Maxence could not repress a gesture of surprise.

"Oh ! it isn't alone that I saw him," added M. Chapelain, "but together with at least a hundred shareholders of the Mutual Credit Bank."

"They are going to do something, then ?"

"No : they only came near doing something. You should have seen them this morning ! They were furious ; they threatened to break everything ; they wanted M. de Thaller's blood. It was terrible ! But M. de Thaller condescended to receive them ; and they became at once as meek as lambs. It is perfectly simple. What do you suppose shareholders can do, no matter how exasperated they may be, when their manager tells them : 'Well, yes, it's a fact you have been robbed, and your money is in great

jeopardy ; but if you make any fuss, if you complain, all is sure to be lost.' Of course, the shareholders keep quiet. It is a well-known fact that a business which has to be liquidated through the law courts is lost ; and swindled shareholders fear the law almost as much as the swindling manager. A single fact will make the situation clearer to you. Less than an hour ago, M. de Thaller's shareholders offered him money to make up the loss." And, after a moment of silence, he added : " But this is not all. Justice has interfered ; and M. de Thaller spent the morning with an investigating magistrate."

" Well ?"

" Well, I have enough experience to assure you that you must not rely any more upon justice than upon the shareholders. Unless there are proofs so evident that they are not likely to exist, M. de Thaller will not be disturbed."

" Oh !"

" Why ? Because, my dear fellow, in all these big financial operations, justice, as much as possible, remains blind. Not through corruption, or any guilty connivance, but through considerations of public interest. If the manager was prosecuted, he would be condemned to a few years' imprisonment ; but the shareholders would at the same time be condemned to lose what they have left ; so that the victims would be more severely punished than the swindler. And so, powerless, justice does not interfere. And that's what accounts for the impudence and impunity of all those high-flown rascals who go about with their heads erect, their pockets filled with other people's money, and half a dozen decorations at their button-hole."

" And what then ?" asked Maxence.

" Then it is evident that your father is lost. Whether or not he have accomplices, he alone will be sacrificed. A scapegoat is needed to be slaughtered on the altar of credit. Well, they will give that much satisfaction to the swindled shareholders. The twelve millions will be lost ; but the shares of the Mutual Credit Bank will go up again, and public morality will be safe."

Somewhat moved by the old lawyer's tone, Maxence inquired : " What do you advise me to do then, sir ?"

" The very reverse of what, on the first impulse, I advised you to do. That's why I have come. I said to you yesterday, ' Make a row, act, scream. It is impossible that your father be alone guilty ; attack M. de Thaller.' To-day, after mature deliberation, I say, ' Keep quiet, hide yourself, let the scandal drop.'"

A bitter smile contracted Maxence's lips. " It is not very brave advice you are giving me there," he said.

" It is a friend's advice—the advice of a man who knows life better than yourself. Poor young man, you are not aware of the peril of certain struggles. All knaves are in league, and sustain each other. To attack one is to attack them all. You have no idea of the occult influences of which a man can dispose who handles millions, and who, in exchange for a favour, has always a bonus to offer, or a good operation to propose. If at least I could see any chance of success ! But you have not one. You never can reach M. de Thaller, henceforth supported by his shareholders. You will only succeed in making an enemy whose hostility will weigh upon your whole life."

" What does it matter ?"

M. Chapelain shrugged his shoulders. " If you were alone," he answered,

"I would say as you do, 'What does it matter?' But you are no longer alone: you have your mother and sister to take care of. You must think of food before thinking of vengeance. How much a month do you earn? Two hundred francs! It is not much for three persons. I would never suggest that you should solicit M. de Thaller's protection; but it would be well, perhaps, to let him know that he has nothing to fear from you. Why shouldn't you do so when you take him back his fifteen thousand francs? If, as everything indicates, he is your father's accomplice, he will certainly be touched by the distress of your family, and, if he has any heart left, he will manage to make you find, without appearing to have anything to do with it, a situation better suited to your wants. I know that such a step must be very painful; but I repeat it, my dear fellow, you can no longer think of yourself alone; and, what one would not do for himself, one does for a mother and a sister."

Maxence said nothing. Not that he was in any way affected by the worthy old lawyer's speech; but he was asking himself whether or not he should confide to him the events which in the past twenty-four hours had so suddenly modified the situation. He did not feel authorised to do so. Marius de Trégars had not bound him to secrecy; but an indiscretion might have fatal consequences. And, after a moment of reflection, he replied evasively: "I am obliged to you, sir, for the interest you have manifested in our welfare; and we shall always greatly prize your advice. But for the present you must allow me to leave you with my mother and sister. I have an appointment with—a friend."

And, without waiting for an answer, he slipped M. de Thaller's fifteen thousand francs in his pocket, and hurried out. It was not to M. de Trégars that he went first, however, but to the Hôtel des Folies.

"Mademoiselle Lucienne has just come home with a big bundle," said Madame Fortin to Maxence, with her pleasantest smile, as soon as she saw him emerge from the dark corridor. For the past twenty-four hours, the worthy landlady had been watching for her lodger, in the hopes of obtaining some information which she might communicate to the neighbours. Without even condescending to answer, a piece of rudeness at which she felt much hurt, he crossed the narrow court-yard of the hotel and hurried upstairs. Mademoiselle Lucienne's room-door was open. He walked in, and, still out of breath from his rapid ascension, he exclaimed: "I am glad to find you in."

The young girl was busy arranging upon her bed a dress of very light-coloured silk, trimmed with ruches and lace, a jacket to match, and a bonnet of extraordinary shape, surrounded with the most brilliant feathers and flowers. "You see what brings me here," she said. "I have just come to dress. At two o'clock the carriage is coming to take me to the Bois, where I am to exhibit this costume, certainly the most ridiculous that Van Klopen has yet made me wear."

A smile flitted across Maxence's lips. "Who knows," said he, "if this is not the last time you will have to perform this odious task? Ah, my friend! what events have taken place since I last saw you!"

"Happy ones?"

"You shall judge for yourself."

He closed the door carefully, and, returning to Mademoiselle Lucienne, "Do you know the Marquis de Trégars?" he asked.

"No more than you do. It was yesterday, at the office of the commissary of police, that I first heard his name."

"Well, before a month is past, M. de Trégars will be Mademoiselle Gilberte Favoral's husband."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Mademoiselle Lucienne with a look of extreme surprise.

But, instead of answering, Maxence resumed: "You told me, that once, in a day of supreme distress, you applied to Madame de Thaller for assistance, whereas you were actually entitled to an indemnity for having been run over and seriously hurt by her carriage."

"That is true."

"Whilst you were in the vestibule, waiting for an answer to your letter, which a servant had taken upstairs, M. de Thaller came in; and, when he saw you, he could not repress a gesture of surprise, almost of terror."

"That is true also."

"This behaviour of M. de Thaller always remained an enigma to you."

"An inexplicable one."

"Well, I think that I can explain it to you now."

"You?"

Lowering his voice; for he knew that at the Hôtel des Folies there was always some indiscreet ear to fear, he answered: "Yes, I, and for the reason that yesterday, when M. de Trégars appeared in my mother's drawing-room, I could not suppress an exclamation of surprise, because, Lucienne, between Marius de Trégars and yourself, there is a resemblance with which it is impossible not to be struck."

Mademoiselle Lucienne had become very pale. "What do you suppose, then?" she asked.

"I believe, my friend, that we are very near penetrating at the same time the mystery of your birth and the secret of the hatred that has pursued you since the day when you set foot in M. de Thaller's house."

Admirably self-possessed as Mademoiselle Lucienne usually was, the quivering of her lips betrayed at this moment the intensity of her emotion. After more than a minute of profound meditation, she said: "The commissary of police has never told me his hopes, except in very vague terms. He has told me enough, however, to make me think that he has already had suspicions similar to yours."

"Of course! Would he otherwise have questioned me on the subject of M. de Trégars?"

Mademoiselle Lucienne shook her head. "And yet," she continued, "even after your explanation, it is in vain that I ask myself how I can so far disturb M. de Thaller's security that he should wish to do away with me."

Maxence made a gesture of indifference. "I confess," he said, "that I don't see it either. But what of that? Without being able to explain why, I feel that the Baron de Thaller is the common enemy—yours, mine, my father's, and M. de Trégars's. And something tells me, that, with M. de Trégars's help, we shall triumph. You would share my confidence, Lucienne, if you knew him. He is a man, and my sister has made no vulgar choice. If he has told my mother that he has the means of serving her, it is because he certainly has." He stopped, and, after a moment of silence, resumed: "Perhaps the commissary of police might readily understand what I only dimly suspect; but, until further orders, we are forbidden to have recourse to him. It is not my own secret that I have just told you, and, if I have confided it to you, it is because I feel that it is a great piece of good fortune for us: and there is no joy for me, that you do not share."

Mademoiselle Lucienne wanted to ask many more particulars. But, looking at his watch, he exclaimed: "Half-past ten! M. de Trégars is waiting for me." And he started off, saying to the young girl, "I will see you to-night: until then, good hope and good courage."

In the court-yard two ill-looking men were talking with the Fortins. But often the Fortins talked with ill-looking men; so he took no notice of them and hastened out. He hailed a passing cab and told the driver to drive him to 70 Rue Lafitte as quick as possible.

When Marius de Trégars finally determined to compel the bold rascals who had swindled his father to disgorge, he took a small, plainly-furnished apartment in the Rue Lafitte, and he engaged to wait upon him an old family servant, whom he had found out of place, and who was thoroughly devoted to him. It was this excellent man who opened the door to Maxence. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "my master has been impatiently expecting you." It was so true that M. de Trégars himself appeared at the same moment, and leading Maxence into the little room which he used as a study. "Do you know," he said whilst shaking him cordially by the hand, "that you are almost an hour behind time?" Maxence had among others the detestable fault, sure indication of a weak nature of never being willing to be in the wrong, and of always having an excuse ready. On this occasion the excuse was too tempting for him to pass it over, and he quickly related how he had been detained by M. Chapelain, and how he had heard from the ex-lawyer what had just taken place at the Mutual Credit Bank.

"I have already heard of it," said M. de Trégars. And he added in a chaffing tone: "Only I attributed your want of punctuality to another reason, a very pretty one too, a brunette."

A purple cloud overspread Maxence's cheeks. "What!" he stammered, "you know?"

"I thought that you must have been in haste to go and tell a person of your acquaintance why, when you saw me yesterday, you uttered an exclamation of surprise."

This time Maxence lost all countenance. "What," he exclaimed, "you know that also?"

M. de Trégars smiled. "I know a great many things my dear M. Maxence," he replied; "and yet, as I do not wish to be suspected of witchcraft, I will tell you where all my science comes from. At the time when your house was closed to me, after seeking for a long time some means of hearing from your sister, I discovered at last that she had for her music-teacher an old Italian, Signor Gismondo Pulci. I applied to him for lessons, and became his pupil. But for the first days he kept looking at me with singular persistence. I inquired the reason; and he told me that he had once had for a neighbour at Batignolles, a young work-girl who resembled me prodigiously. I paid no attention to this circumstance, and had in fact completely forgotten it; when quite lately, Gismondo told me that he had just seen his former neighbour again, and what's more, arm in arm with you, and that you had entered the Hôtel des Folies together. As he insisted again upon that famous resemblance, I determined to see for myself. I watched and I saw that my old Italian was not quite wrong, and that I had, perhaps, just found the weapon I was looking for."

With staring eyes and gaping mouth Maxence looked like a man fallen from the clouds. "Ah, you played the spy!" he said.

M. de Trégars snapped his fingers with a gesture of indifference. "It is certain," he replied, "that for a month past I have been doing a singular

business. But it is not by remaining on my chair, preaching against the corruption of the age that I can attain my object. The end justifies the means. Honest men are very silly, I think, to allow the rascals to get the better of them under the sentimental pretext that they cannot condescend to make use of their weapons."

But an honourable scruple was tormenting Maxence. "And you think yourself well-informed, sir?" he inquired. "You know Lucienne?"

"Enough to know that she is not what she seems to be, and what almost any other would have been in her place; enough to be certain, that if she shows herself two or three times a week driving in the Bois, it is not for her pleasure; enough also to be persuaded, that despite appearances, she is not your mistress, and that far from having disturbed your life, and compromised your prospects, she kept you in the right path at the moment, perhaps, when you were about to branch off into the wrong one."

Marius de Trégars was assuming fantastic proportions in Maxence's mind. "How did you manage," he stammered, "to find out the truth?"

"With time and money, everything is possible."

"But you must have had very grave reasons to take so much trouble about Lucienne."

"Very grave ones, indeed."

"You know that she was basely abandoned when quite a child?"

"Perfectly."

"And that she was brought up through charity—"

"By some poor gardeners at Louveciennes; yes I know all that."

Maxence was trembling with joy. It seemed to him that his most dazzling hopes were about to be realized. Seizing his friend's hand. "Ah, you know Lucienne's family!" he exclaimed.

But M. de Trégars shook his head. "I have suspicions," he answered; "but up to this time, I have suspicions only, I assure you."

"But that family does exist; since they have already at three different times attempted to get rid of the poor girl."

"I think as you do; but we must have proofs. However, we shall find some soon. You may rest assured of that."

Here he was interrupted by the noise of the door opening. The old servant came in, and advancing to the centre of the room with a mysterious look, he said in a low voice, "The Baroness de Thaller."

Marius de Trégars started violently. "Where?" he asked.

"She is down stairs in her carriage," replied the servant. "Her foot man is here, and he has asked whether you are at home, and whether she may come up."

"Can she possibly have heard anything?" murmured M. de Trégars with a frown. And after a moment of reflection, he added quickly: "All the more reason to see her. Let her come. Ask her to do me the honour of coming up-stairs."

This last incident completely upset all Maxence's ideas. He no longer knew what to imagine. "Quick," said M. de Trégars to him: "quick, disappear; and whatever you may hear, not a word!" And he pushed him into his bedroom, which was divided from the study by a mere tapestry curtain.

It was time, for already in the next room could be heard a great rustling of silk and starched petticoats. Madame de Thaller appeared. She was still the same coarsely beautiful woman, who sixteen years before had sat at Madame Favoral's table. Time had passed scarcely touching her with

the tip of his wing. Her flesh had retained its dazzling whiteness; her hair of a bluish black its wonderful opulence; her lips their carmine blue; her eyes their lustre. Her figure only had become heavier, her features less delicate; and her neck and throat had lost their undulations, and the purity of their outlines. But neither the years, nor the millions, nor the intimacy of the most fashionable women, had been able to give her those qualities which cannot be acquired—grace, distinction, and taste. If there was a woman accustomed to dress, it was she. Her elegance was quoted and copied. And yet there was about her, always and under all circumstances, an indescribable flavour of the upstart. Her gestures had remained trivial; her voice common and vulgar. Throwing herself into an arm-chair and bursting into a loud laugh. "Confess, my dear marquis," she said, "that you are terribly astonished to see me thus drop upon you without warning, at eleven o'clock in the morning."

"I feel above all, terribly flattered," replied M. de Trégars smiling.

With a rapid glance she surveyed the little study, the modest furniture, the papers piled on the desk as if she had hoped that the dwelling would reveal to her something of the master's ideas and projects. "I have just come from Van Klopen's," she resumed; "and passing your door I took a fancy to come in and stir you up; and here I am."

M. de Trégars was too much a man of the world, and of the best world, to allow his features to betray the secret of his impressions; and yet, to any one who had known him well, a certain contraction of the eyelids would have revealed a serious annoyance and an intense anxiety. "How is the baron?" he inquired.

"As sound as an oak," answered Madame de Thaller, "notwithstanding all the cares and the troubles which you can well imagine. By the way, you know what has happened to us?"

"I read in the papers that the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank had disappeared."

"And it is but too true! That wretch Favoral has gone off with an enormous amount of money."

"Twelve millions, I heard."

"Something like it. A man who had the reputation of a saint too; a puritan. Trust people's faces after that! I never liked him, I confess. But M. de Thaller had a perfect fancy for him; and, when he had spoken of his Favoral, there was nothing more to be said. Any way, he has cleared out, leaving his family without means. A very interesting family, it seems, too—a wife who is goodness itself, and a charming daughter; at least, so says Costeclar, who is very much in love with her." M. de Trégars's countenance remained perfectly indifferent, like that of a man who is hearing about persons and things in which he does not take the slightest interest. Madame de Thaller noticed it. "But it isn't to tell you all this," she went on, "that I came up. It is an interested motive that brought me. We have, some of my friends and myself, organised a lottery, a work of charity, my dear marquis, and quite patriotic, for the benefit of the Alsatians. I have lots of tickets to dispose of; and I've thought of you to help me out."

"I am at your orders, madame," answered Marius, more smiling than ever, "but, in mercy, spare me."

She took some tickets from a small tortoise-shell pocket-book. "Twenty, at ten francs," she said. "It isn't too much, is it?"

"It is a great deal for my modest resources."

She pocketed the ten napoleons which he handed her, and in a tone of ironical compassion, she asked: "Are you so very poor, then?"

"Well, I am neither a banker nor a broker, you know."

She had risen, and was smoothing the folds of her dress. "My dear marquis," she resumed, "it is certainly not I who will pity you. When a man of your age, and with your name, remains poor, it is his own fault. Are there no rich heiresses?"

"I confess that I have not tried to find one yet."

"She looked him straight in the eyes, and then, suddenly bursting into a laugh, she said: "Look around you, and I'm sure you'll not be long discovering a beautiful young girl, very blonde, who would be delighted to become Marchioness de Trégars, and who would bring in her pinafore, a dowry of from twelve to fifteen hundred thousand francs in good securities, securities which the Favorals can't carry off. Think well over the matter, and come and see us. You know that M. de Thaller is very fond of you; and, after all the trouble we have been having, you owe us a visit."

Whereupon she went out, M. de Trégars going down to escort her to her carriage. But when he came back, he exclaimed to Maxence: "Attention! for it is very evident that the De Thallers have wind of something."

III.

MADAME DE THALLER'S was a revelation visit; and there was no need of very much perspicacity to guess her anxiety beneath her bursts of laughter, and to understand that it was a bargain she had come to propose. It was evident, therefore, that Marius de Trégars held within his hands the principal threads of that complicated intrigue which had just culminated in the robbery of twelve millions. But would he be able to make use of them? What were his designs, and his means of action? That is what Maxence could not in any way conjecture. He had no time to ask questions.

"Come," said M. de Trégars, whose agitation was manifest, "come, let us lunch, we have not a moment to lose." And whilst his servant was bringing in the modest meal, "I am expecting M. d'Escajoul," he added. "Show him in as soon as he comes."

Though mixing but little with the financial world Maxence had yet heard the name of Octave d'Escajoul. Who has not seen him happy and smiling, his eye bright and his lip ruddy notwithstanding his fifty years, walking on the sunny side of the Boulevards, with his royal blue jacket and his eternal white waistcoat? He is passionately fond of everything that tends to make life pleasant and easy; dines at Bignon's, or the Café Anglais; plays baccarat at his club with extraordinary luck; has the most comfortable suite of apartments and the most elegant brougham in all Paris. With all this he is pleased to declare that he is the happiest of men, and is certainly one of the most popular, for he cannot walk from the Chaussée-d'Antin to the Rue Vivienne without receiving at least fifty salutations, and shaking hands twice as often. And when any one asks, "What does he do?" the invariable answer is, "Why, he operates." To explain what sort of operations would not be, perhaps, very easy. In the world of rogues, there are some rogues more formidable and more skilful than the rest, who always manage to escape the hand of the law. They are not such fools as to operate in person, not they! They content themselves with watching their friends and comrades. If a good haul is made, at once they appear and

claim their share. And as they always threaten to inform there is no help for it but to let them pocket a large proportion of the profit. Well, in a more elevated sphere, in the world of speculation, it is precisely that lucrative and honourable industry which M. d'Escajoul carries on. Thoroughly master of his ground, possessing a superior scent and an imperturbable patience, always awake and continually on the watch, he never operates unless he is sure to win. And the day when the manager of some company has violated his charter, or stretched the law a little too far, he may be sure to see M. d'Escajoul appear and ask for some little—advantages, and proffer in exchange the most thorough discretion, and even his kind offices. Two or three of his friends have heard him say: "Who would dare to blame me! What I am doing is very moral."

Such is the man who came in smiling, just as Maxence and Marius de Trégars had sat down at the table. M. de Trégars rose to receive him. "You will lunch with us?" he said.

"Thank you," answered M. d'Escajoul. "I lunched precisely at eleven as usual. Punctuality is a politeness which a gentleman owes to his stomach. But I will accept with pleasure a drop of that old Cognac which you offered me the other evening." He took a seat, and the valet brought him a glass, which he set on the edge of the table. Then he added: "I have just seen our man."

Maxence understood that he was referring to M. de Thaller.

"Well?" inquired M. de Trégars.

"Impossible to get anything out of him. I turned him over and over every way. Nothing!"

"Indeed!"

"It's so; and you know if I understand the business. It is no use talking to a man who answers you all the time, 'The matter is in the hands of the law; experts have been named; I have nothing to fear from the most minute investigations.'" By the look which Marius de Trégars kept riveted upon M. d'Escajoul, it was easy to see that his confidence in him was not without limits. He felt it and with an air of injured innocence. "Do you suspect me, by chance," he asked, "to have allowed myself to be hoodwinked by De Thaller!" And as M. de Trégars said nothing, which was the most eloquent of answers. "Upon my word," he insisted, "You are wrong to doubt me. Was it you who came after me? No. It was I, who hearing through Marcolet the history of your fortune, came to tell you, 'Do you want to know a way of settling De Thaller?' And the reasons I then had to wish that De Thaller might be settled, I have them still. He trifled with me, he sold me, and he must suffer for it; for if it came to be known that I could be taken in with impunity, it would be all over with me."

After a moment of silence, M. de Trégars asked: "Do you believe, then, that M. de Thaller is innocent?"

"Perhaps."

"That would be curious."

"Or else his measures are so well taken that he has absolutely nothing to fear. If Favoral takes everything upon himself, what can they say to the other? If they have acted in collusion the thing has been prepared for a long time; and before commencing to fish they must have troubled the water so well that justice will be unable to see anything in it."

"And you see no one who could help us?"

"Favoral—"

To Maxence's great surprise, M. de Trégars shrugged his shoulders. "He is far away," he said, "and were he at hand it is quite evident that if he is in collusion with M. de Thaller he would not speak."

"Of course."

"That being the case, what can we do?"

"Wait."

M. de Trégars made a gesture of discouragement. "I might as well give up the fight, then," he said, "and try to compromise."

"Why so? We don't know what may happen. Keep quiet, be patient, I am here, and I am looking out for squalls." He got up and prepared to leave.

"You have more experience than I have," said M. de Trégars; "and since that's your opinion—"

M. d'Escajoul had resumed all his good humour. "Very well, then, it's understood," he said, pressing M. de Trégars's hand. "I am watching for both of us; and if I see a chance I come at once, and you act."

But the outer door had hardly closed, when suddenly the countenance of Marius de Trégars changed. Shaking the hand which M. d'Escajoul had just touched. "Pouah!" he exclaimed with a look of thorough disgust, "pouah!" And, noticing Maxence's look of surprise, "Don't you understand," he asked, "that this old rascal has been sent to me by De Thaller to discover my intentions, and mislead me by false information? I had scented him, fortunately; and, if either of us is dupe of the other, I have every reason to believe that it is not me."

They had finished their lunch. M. de Trégars called his servant. "Have you been for a cab?" he asked.

"It is at the door, sir."

"Then let us be off."

Maxence had the good sense not to over-estimate himself. Perfectly convinced that he could accomplish nothing alone, he was firmly resolved to trust blindly to Marius de Trégars. He followed him, therefore; and it was only after the cab had started, that he ventured to ask, "Where are we going?"

"Didn't you hear me," replied M. de Trégars, "tell the driver to take us to the Palais de Justice?"

"Yes, I did; but what I wish to know is, what we are going to do there?"

"You are going, my dear friend, to ask an audience of the investigating magistrate, who has your father's case in charge, and deposit in his hands the fifteen thousand francs you have in your pockets."

"What! you wish me to—"

"I think it better to place that money in the hands of justice, which will appreciate the step, than in those of M. de Thaller, who would not breathe a word about it. We are in a position where nothing should be neglected; and that money may prove an indication."

But they had arrived. M. de Trégars guided Maxence through the labyrinth of corridors of the building, until he came to a long gallery, at the entrance of which an usher was seated, reading a newspaper. "M. Barban d'Avranchel?" inquired M. de Trégars.

"He is in his office," replied the usher.

"Please ask him if he will receive an important deposition in the Favoral case."

The usher rose somewhat reluctantly, and, while he was gone, M. de

Trégars said to Maxence. "You will go in alone, I shall not appear; and it is important that my name should not even be pronounced. But, above all, try and remember even the magistrate's most insignificant words; for, upon what he tells you, I shall regulate my conduct."

The usher returned. "M. d'Avranchel will receive you," he said. And conducting Maxence to the extremity of the gallery, he opened a small door and pushed him in, saying, at the same time: "This is his office, sir; walk in."

It was a small room with a low ceiling, and poorly furnished. The faded curtains and threadbare carpet showed plainly that more than one magistrate had occupied it, and that legions of accused criminals had passed through it. In front of a table two men—one old, the magistrate; the other young, the clerk—were initialing and classifying papers. These papers related to the Favoral case, and were all indorsed in large letters: Mutual Credit Bank. As soon as Maxence appeared the magistrate rose, and, after measuring him with a clear and cold look: "Who are you?" he interrogated.

In a somewhat husky voice Maxence stated his name and surname.

"Ah! you are Vincent Favoral's son," interrupted the magistrate. "And it was you who helped him to escape through the window? I was going to send you a summons this very day; but, since you are here, so much the better. You have something important to communicate I have been told."

Very few people, even among the most strictly honest, can overcome a certain unpleasant feeling, when, having crossed the threshold of the Palais de Justice, they find themselves in the presence of an investigating magistrate. More than almost any one else Maxence was likely to be accessible to that vague and inexplicable feeling; and it was with an effort that he answered: "On Saturday evening the Baron de Thaller called at our house a few minutes before the commissary. After loading my father with reproaches, he invited him to leave the country; and, in order to facilitate his flight, he handed him these fifteen thousand francs. My father declined to accept them; and at the moment of parting, he told me to return them to M. de Thaller. I thought it best to return them to you, sir."

"Why?"

"Because I wished the fact known to you of the money having been offered and refused."

M. Barban d'Avranchel was quietly stroking his whiskers, once of a bright red, but now almost entirely white.

"Is this an insinuation against the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank?" he asked.

Maxence looked straight at him: "I accuse no one," he said in a tone which affirmed precisely the reverse.

"I must tell you," resumed the magistrate, "that M. de Thaller has himself informed me of this circumstance. When he called at your house, he was then ignorant of the extent of the embezzlements, and was in hopes of being able to hush up the affairs. That's why he wished his cashier to start for Belgium. This system of helping criminals to escape the just punishment of their crimes is to be bitterly deplored; but it is quite the habit of financial magnates, who prefer sending some poor devil of an employé to hang himself abroad, than run the risk of compromising their credit by confessing that they have been robbed."

Maxence had a great deal to say ; but M. de Trégars had recommended him the most extreme reserve. He remained silent.

"On the other hand," added the magistrate, "the refusal to accept the money so generously offered does not speak in Favoral's favour. He was well aware, when he left, that it would require a great deal of money to reach the frontier, escape pursuit, and hide himself abroad ; and, if he refused the fifteen thousand francs, it must have been because he was well provided for already."

Tears of shame and rage started from Maxence's eyes. "I am certain, sir," he exclaimed, "that my father went off without a sou."

"What has become of the millions, then !" asked the magistrate coldly.

Maxence hesitated. Why not mention his suspicions ? He dared not.

"My father speculated at the Bourse," he stammered.

"And he led a scandalous life, keeping up, away from home, a style of living which must have absorbed immense sums."

"We knew nothing of it, sir ; and our first suspicions were aroused by what the commissary of police told us."

The magistrate insisted no more ; and in a tone which indicated that his question was a mere matter of form, and that he attached but little importance to the answer, he asked : "You have no news from your father ?"

"None whatever."

"And you have no idea where he is hiding ?"

"Not the slightest."

M. d'Avranchel had already resumed his seat at the table, and was again busy with his papers. "You may retire," he said. "You will be notified when I need you."

Maxence felt very much discouraged when he rejoined M. de Trégars at the entrance of the gallery. "The magistrate is convinced of M. de Thaller's entire innocence," he said.

But as soon as he had narrated, with a fidelity that did honour to his memory, all that had just occurred, "Nothing is lost yet," declared M. de Trégars. And, taking from his pocket the bill for two trunks which had been found in M. Favoral's portfolio, "There," he said, "we shall know our fate."

M. de Trégars and Maxence were in luck. They had a sharp driver and a good horse ; and in twenty minutes they were at the shop where the trunks had been bought.

"Well," exclaimed M. de Trégars, "I suppose it has to be done." And with the look of a man who has made up his mind to do something which is extremely repugnant to him, he jumped out of the cab, and, followed by Maxence, entered the shop. It was a modest establishment ; and the people who kept it, husband and wife, seeing two customers coming in, advanced to meet them, with that welcoming smile which blossoms upon the lips of every Parisian shopkeeper. "What do you desire, gentlemen ?" And, with wonderful volubility, they went on enumerating every article which they had for sale in their shop, from the "indispensable-necessary," containing seventy-seven pieces of solid silver, and costing four thousand francs, down to the humblest carpet-bag at thirty-nine sous.

But Marius de Trégars interrupted them as soon as he could get an opportunity. "It was here, wasn't it," he inquired showing them their bill, "that the two trunks were bought which are charged in this account ?"

"Yes, sir," answered simultaneously both husband and wife.

"When were they delivered ?"

"Our porter went to deliver them less than two hours after they were bought."

"Where?"

By this time the shopkeepers were beginning to exchange uneasy glances. "Why do you ask?" inquired the woman in a tone which indicated that she had the settled intention not to answer, unless for good and valid reasons.

To obtain the simplest information is not always as easy as might be supposed. The Parisian tradesman's suspicions are easily aroused; and as his head is stuffed with stories of detectives and robbers, he becomes as dumb as an oyster as soon as he is questioned. But M. de Trégars had foreseen the difficulty. "I beg you to believe, madame," he explained, "that my questions are not dictated by an idle curiosity. Here are the facts. A relative of ours, a man of a certain age, of whom we are very fond, and whose head is a little weak left his home some forty-eight hours since. We are looking for him and we are in hopes, if we find these trunks, to find him at the same time."

With furtive glances the husband and wife were tacitly consulting each other. "The truth is," said they "we wouldn't like under any consideration, to commit an indiscretion which might result to the prejudice of a customer."

"Fear nothing," said M. de Trégars with a re-assuring gesture. "If we have not had recourse to the police, it is because you know it isn't pleasant to have the police interfere in one's affairs. If, however, you have any objections to answer me, I must of course, apply to the commissary."

The argument proved decisive. "As that's the case," replied the woman, "I am ready to tell all I know."

"Well then, madame, what do you know?"

"These two trunks were bought on Friday afternoon last, by an elderly man tall, very thin, with a stern countenance and wearing a long frock-coat."

"No more doubt," murmured Maxence. "It was indeed he."

"And now," the woman went on, "that you have just told me that your relative is a little weak in the head, I remember that this gentleman had a strange sort of way about him, and that he kept walking about the shop as if he had pins and needles in his legs. And awfully particular he was too! Nothing was handsome enough and strong enough for him; and he was anxious about the safety-locks, as he had, he said many objects of value, documents and securities to put away."

"And where did he tell you to send the two trunks?"

"Rue du Cirque, to Madame—— wait a minute I have the name on the tip of my tongue."

"You must have it on your books too," remarked M. de Trégars.

The husband was already looking over his day-book.

"April 26, 1872," he said. "April 26, here it is; 'Two leather trunks, patent safety-locks, Madame Zélie Cadelle, 49 Rue du Cirque.'"

Without too much affectation, M. de Trégars had drawn near to the shop-keeper and was looking over his shoulder. "What is that," he asked, "written there below the address?"

"That, sir, is the direction left by the customer 'Mark on each end of the trunks in large letters, Rio de Janeiro.'"

Maxence could not suppress an exclamation. But the tradesman mistook him; and seizing this magnificent opportunity to display his knowledge

"Rio de Janeiro is the capital of Brazil," he said in a tone of importance. "And your relative evidently intended to go there; and if he has not changed his mind, I doubt whether you can overtake him; for the Brazilian steamer was to have sailed yesterday from Havre."

Whatever may have been his feelings, M. de Trégars remained perfectly calm. "If that's the case," he said to the shopkeepers, "I think I had better give up the search. I am much obliged to you, however, for your information."

"Do you really believe," inquired Maxence when they were once again seated in their cab, "that my father has left France?"

M. de Trégars shook his head. "I will give you my opinion," he replied "after I have investigated matters in the Rue du Cirque."

They drove there in a few minutes; and the cab having stopped at the end of the street he walked as far as No. 49. It was a small house, only one storey, built between a sanded court-yard and a garden, the tall trees in which showed above the roof. At the windows were curtains of light-coloured silk, a sure indication of the presence of a young and pretty woman.

For a few minutes Marius de Trégars remained in observation; but, as nothing stirred, "We must find out something somehow," he exclaimed impatiently. And, noticing a large grocer's shop at No. 62, he directed his steps towards it, still accompanied by Maxence. It was the hour of the day when customers are rare. Standing in the centre of the shop, the grocer, a big fat man with an air of importance, was looking after his assistants, who were busy putting things in order. M. de Trégars took him aside, and said with an accent of mystery: "I am in the employ of M. Drayton, the jeweller in the Rue de la Paix; and I come to ask you one of those little favours which tradespeople owe to each other."

A frown appeared on the fat man's countenance. He thought, perhaps, that M. Drayton's clerks were rather too stylish-looking; or else, perhaps, he felt apprehensive of one of those numerous petty swindles of which shopkeepers are constantly the victims. "What is it?" he asked. "Speak out!"

"I am on my way," resumed M. de Trégars, "to deliver a ring which a lady purchased of us yesterday. She is not a regular customer, and has given us no references. If she doesn't pay, ought I to leave the ring! My employer said to me, 'Consult some prominent tradesman of the neighbourhood, and follow his advice.'"

Prominent tradesman! Delicately tickled vanity was dancing in the grocer's eyes. "What is the lady's name?" he inquired.

"Madame Zélie Cadelle."

The grocer burst out laughing. "In that case, my lad," he said, tapping familiarly on the shoulder of the so-called jeweller, "whether she pays or not, you can leave the article."

The familiarity was not, perhaps, very much to the taste of the Marquis de Trégars. "She is rich, then, that lady?" he asked.

"Personally, no. But she is protected by an old fool, who allows her all her fancies."

"Indeed!"

"It is scandalous, and you cannot form an idea of the amount of money that is spent in that house. Horses, carriages, servants, dresses, balls, dinners, card-playing all night, a perpetual carnival: it must be ruinous!"

M. de Trégars never winced. "And the old man who pays," he asked; "do you know him?"

"I have seen him pass; a tall, lean old fellow, who doesn't look very rich, either. But excuse me, here is a customer I must wait upon."

Having regained the street, "We must separate now," declared M. de Trégars to Maxence.

"What! You wish to—"

"Go and wait for me in that café yonder, at the corner of the street. I must see this Zélie Cadelle and speak to her." And, without suffering an objection on the part of Maxence, he walked resolutely up to the house and rang vigorously.

At the sound of the bell appeared one of those servants, who seem manufactured on purpose, heaven knows where, for the special service of young persons who keep house, a tall rascal with sallow complexion and straight hair, a cynical eye, and a low, impudent smile. "What do you wish, sir?" he inquired from inside the gate.

"That you should open the gate, first," exclaimed M. de Trégars, with such a look and such an accent that the other obeyed at once. "And now," he added, "go and announce me to Madame Zélie Cadelle."

"Madame is out," replied the valet. And, noticing that M. de Trégars shrugged his shoulders, "Upon my word," he added, "she has gone to the Bois with one of her friends. If you won't believe me, ask my comrades there." And he pointed out two other servants, of the same pattern as himself, who were sitting at a table in the coach-house, playing cards and drinking.

But M. de Trégars did not mean to be imposed upon. He felt certain that the man was lying. Instead, therefore, of discussing, "You are to take me to your mistress," he ordered, in a tone that admitted of no objection; "or else I'll find my way to her alone."

It was evident that he would do just as he said, by force if needs be. The valet saw this, and, after hesitating a moment longer, "Come along, then," he said, "since you insist so much. We'll speak to the chambermaid." And, having led M. de Trégars into the vestibule, he called out: "Mam'selle Amanda!" A woman at once made her appearance who was a worthy mate for the valet. She must have been about forty; and the most alarming duplicity could be read upon her features, deeply pitted by the small-pox. She wore a pretentious dress, an apron like a stage-servant, and a cap profusely decorated with flowers and ribbons. "Here is a gentleman," said the valet, "who insists upon seeing madame. Do as you think best."

Better than her fellow-servant, Mademoiselle Amanda could judge with whom she had to deal. A single glance at this obstinate visitor convinced her that he was not one of those who can be easily turned off. Putting on, therefore, her pleasantest smile, thus displaying at the same time her decayed teeth, "The fact is, sir, that you will very much disturb madame," she observed.

"I will excuse myself."

"But I'll be scolded." Instead of answering, M. de Trégars took a couple of twenty-franc-notes out of his pocket, and slipped them into her hand. "Please follow me to the drawing-room, then," she said with a deep sigh.

M. de Trégars did so, whilst observing everything around him with the attentive perspicacity of a deputy sheriff preparing to make out an inventory. Being double, the house was much more spacious than it seemed to be from the street, and it was arranged with that science of comfort which

is the genius of modern architects. The most lavish luxury was displayed on all sides ; not that solid, quiet, and harmonious luxury which is the result of long years of opulence, but the coarse, loud, and superficial luxury of the upstart, who is eager to enjoy quick, and in a hurry to possess all that he has coveted from others. The vestibule was a folly, with its exotic plants climbing over crystal trellises, and its Sèvres and China flowerstands filled with gigantic azaleas. And all along the gilt rail of the stairs marble and bronze statuary was intermingled with masses of flowers.

"It must cost twenty thousand francs a year to keep up this conservatory alone," thought M. de Trégars.

At length the old chambermaid opened a lemonwood door with silver lock. "This is the drawing-room," she said. "Please to take a seat whilst I go and tell madame."

In this drawing-room everything had been combined to dazzle. Furniture, carpets, hangings, everything was rich, too rich, furiously, incontestably, obviously rich. The chandelier was a masterpiece, the clock an original and unique piece of work. The pictures hanging upon the walls were all signed with the most famous names. "To judge of the rest by what I have seen," thought M. de Trégars, "there must have been at least four or five hundred thousand francs spent on this house." And, although he was shocked by a quantity of things which betrayed the most absolute lack of taste, he could hardly persuade himself that the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank was the master of this sumptuous dwelling ; and he was asking himself whether he had not followed a wrong scent, when a circumstance came and put an end to all his doubts. Upon the mantle-piece, in a small velvet frame, was Vincent Favoral's portrait. M. de Trégars had been seated for a few minutes, and was collecting his somewhat scattered thoughts, when a rustling noise made him turn round. Madame Zélie Cadelle stood at the door. She was a woman twenty-five or six years old, rather tall, slim, and well made. Her face was pale and worn ; and her heavy dark hair was scattered over neck and shoulders. She looked at once sarcastic and good-natured, impudent and innocent, with her sparkling eyes, her turned-up nose, and wide mouth furnished with teeth sound and white like those of a young dog. She had wasted no time upon her dress, for she wore a plain blue cashmere wrapper, fastened at the waist with a sort of silk scarf of similar colour.

"Dear me !" she exclaimed, as she entered the room, "how very singular !"

M. de Trégars stepped forward. "What is ?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing !" she replied, "nothing at all." And without ceasing to look at him with a wondering eye, but suddenly changing her tone of voice, she added : "And so, sir, my servants have been unable to keep you from forcing yourself into my house !"

"I hope, madame," said M. de Trégars with a polite bow, "that you will excuse my persistence. I come for a matter which can suffer no delay."

She was still looking at him fixedly. "Who are you ?" she asked.

"My name will not afford you any information. I am the Marquis de Trégars."

"Trégars !" she repeated, looking up at the ceiling, as if in search of an inspiration. "Trégars ! Never heard of it." And, throwing herself into an armchair, she resumed : "Well, sir, what do you wish with me ? Speak !"

He had taken a seat near her, and kept his eyes riveted upon hers. "I have come, madame," he replied, "to ask you to put me in the way to see and speak to the man whose photograph is there on the mantelpiece."

He expected to take her by surprise, and that by a shudder, a cry, a gesture, she might betray her secret. Not at all. "Are you, then, one of M. Vincent's friends?" she asked quietly.

M. de Trégars understood, and this was subsequently confirmed, that it was under his christian name of Vincent alone that the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank was known in the Rue du Cirque. "Yes, I am a friend of his," he replied; "and if I could see him I could probably render him an important service."

"Well, you are too late."

"Why?"

"Because M. Vincent left the country more than twenty-four hours ago."

"Are you sure of that?"

"As sure as a person can be who went to the railway station yesterday with him and all his luggage."

"You saw him leave?"

"As I see you."

"Where was he going?"

"To Havre, to take the steamer for Brazil, which was to sail that same day; so that, by this time, he must be awfully seasick."

"And you really think that it was his intention to go to Brazil?"

"He said so. It was written on all his trunks in letters half a foot high. Besides, he showed me his ticket."

"Have you any idea what can have induced him to expatriate himself thus, at his age?"

"He told me that he had spent all his money, and also that of some other people; that he was afraid of being arrested; and that he was going yonder to be quiet, and try to make another fortune."

Was Madame Zélie speaking the truth? To ask the question would have been rather foolish; but an effort might be made to find out. Carefully concealing his own impressions, and the importance he attached to this conversation, M. de Trégars resumed: "I pity you sincerely, madame, for you must be sorely grieved by this sudden departure."

"I!" she said in a voice that came from the heart. "I don't care a straw."

Marius de Trégars knew well enough the ladies of the class to which he supposed that Madame Zélie Cadelle must belong, not to be surprised at this frank declaration. "And yet," he said, "you are indebted to him for the princely magnificence that surrounds you here."

"Of course."

"He being gone, as you say, will you be able to keep up your style of living?"

Half raising herself from her seat, she exclaimed: "I haven't the slightest idea of doing so. Never in all my life have I before had such a stupid time as for the last five months that I have spent in this gilded cage. What a bore, my beloved brethren! I am yawning still at the mere thought of the number of times I have yawned in it."

M. de Trégars's gesture of surprise was the more natural, as his surprise was immense. "You are tired of being here?" he asked.

"To death!"

"And you have only been here five months?"

"Dear me, yes ! and by the merest chance, too, as you'll see. One day at Versailles at the beginning of last December, I was coming from—but no matter where I was coming from. At any rate, I hadn't a sou in my pocket, and nothing but an old calico dress on my back ; and I was going along, not in the best of humour, as you may imagine, when I felt that some one was following me. Without turning round, and from the corner of my eye, I looked over my shoulder, and I saw a respectable-looking old gentleman wearing a long frock-coat."

"M. Vincent?"

"In his own natural person, and who was walking, walking. I quietly began to walk slower ; and as soon as we came to a place where there was hardly any one he came to my side." Something comical must have happened at this moment, which Madame Zélie Cadelle said nothing about ; for she laughed most heartily, a frank and sonorous laugh. "Then," she resumed, "he began at once to explain that I reminded him of a person whom he loved tenderly, and whom he had just had the misfortune to lose, adding that he would deem himself the happiest of men, if I would allow him to take care of me and insure me a brilliant position."

"Just like that rascal Vincent !" said M. de Trégars, just to say something.

Madame Zélie shook her head. "You know him," she continued. "He is not young ; he is not handsome ; he is not funny. I did not fancy him one bit ; and if I had only known where to find shelter for the night, I'd soon have sent him to old Nick, him and his brilliant position. But not having enough money to buy myself a penny-loaf it wasn't the time to put on any airs. So I told him that I accepted. He hailed a cab ; we got into it ; and he brought me right straight here."

M. de Trégars positively required his entire self-control to conceal the intensity of his curiosity. "Was this house, then, already as it is now ?" he asked.

"Precisely, except that there were no servants in it except the chamber-maid, Amanda, who is M. Vincent's confidante. All the others had been dismissed ; and it was a hostler from a stable near by who looked after the horses."

"And what then ?"

"Well, you may imagine what I looked like in the midst of all this magnificence, with my old shoes and my fourpenny skirt. Something like a grease-spot on a satin dress. M. Vincent seemed delighted, nevertheless. He had sent Amanda out to get me some underclothing and a ready-made wrapper ; and whilst waiting he took me all through the house, from the cellar to the garret, saying that everything was at my command, and that the next day I would have a battalion of servants to wait on me." It was evidently with perfect frankness that she was speaking, and with the pleasure one feels in telling an extraordinary adventure. But suddenly she stopped short, as if discovering that she was forgetting herself and going farther than was proper. And it was only after a moment of reflection that she resumed : "It was like fairyland to me. I had never tasted the opulence of the great, you see, and I had never had any money, except that which I earned. So during the first days I did nothing but run up and down stairs admiring everything, feeling everything with my own hands, and looking at myself in the glass to make sure that I was not dreaming. I rang the bell just to make the servants come up ; I spent hours trying on dresses ; then I'd have the horses put to the carriage, and either drive to

the Bois, or go out shopping. M. Vincent gave me as much money as I wanted ; and it seemed as though I never spent enough. In short, I was like a mad woman." A cloud appeared upon Madame Zélie's countenance, and changing suddenly her tone, she continued : " Unfortunately, one gets tired of everything. At the end of two weeks I knew the house from top to bottom, and after a month I was sick of the whole thing ; so that one night I began dressing. ' Where do you want to go to ? ' Amanda asked me. ' Why, to Mabilles to dance a quadrille or two. '—' Impossible ! '—' Why ? '—' Because M. Vincent does not wish you to go out at night. '—' We'll see about that ! ' The next day I told all this to M. Vincent ; and he said that Amanda was right ; that it was not proper for a woman in my position to frequent public balls ; and that, if I went out at night I should not come in again. If it hadn't been for the fine carriage and all that, I would have cleared out that very minute. Any way, I became disgusted from that moment and have been more and more so ever since ; and if M. Vincent had not himself left I certainly would have bolted."

" To go where ? "

" Anywhere. Look here, now ! do you suppose I need a man to support me ! No, thank goodness ! Little Zélie, here present, has only to apply to any dressmaker, and she would be glad to give her four francs a day to work the machine. And she would at least be free ; and she could laugh and dance as much as she liked."

M. de Trégars saw that he had made a mistake. Madame Zélie Cadelle was certainly not particularly virtuous ; but she was far from being the woman he had expected to meet. " At any rate," he said, " you did well to wait patiently."

" I do not regret it."

" If this house now belongs to you—"

She interrupted him with a loud burst of laughter. " This house ! " she exclaimed. " Why, it was sold some days ago, with everything in it, furniture, horses, carriages, everything except myself. A young gentleman, rather a swell, has bought it for a tall girl who looks like a goose and is as dry as a stick, and who carries over a thousand francs worth of red hair on her head."

" Are you sure of that ? "

" Sure as I live, having seen with my own eyes the young swell and his red-headed friend hand heaps of bank-notes to M. Vincent. They are to move in on the day after to-morrow ; and they have invited me to the house-warming. But no more of it for me, thank you ! I am sick and tired of all these people. And the proof of it is, I am busy packing up my belongings ; and lots of them I have too, dresses, underclothes, jewellery. He was a good-natured fellow, old Vincent was, anyhow. He gave me money enough to buy some furniture. I have taken a small apartment in the Rue St. Lazare ; and I am going to set up in the dressmaking line on my own hook. And won't we laugh then ! and won't we have some fun to make up for lost time ! Come, my children, take your places for the quadrille ! " And, bouncing out of her chair, she began one of those bold cancan steps which astound the policemen on duty in the ball-rooms.

" Bravo ! " cried M. de Trégars, forcing himself to smile, " bravo ! " He saw clearly now what sort of woman was Madame Zélie Cadelle ; how he should speak to her, and what chords he might yet cause to vibrate within her. He recognized the true daughter of Paris, wayward and nervous, who in the midst of her disorders preserves an instinctive pride ; who places her

independence far above all the money in the world ; who gives rather than sells herself ; who knows no law but her caprice, no morality but the policeman, no religion but pleasure. As soon as she returned to her seat, he resumed : " You are dancing gaily, and poor Vincent is doubtless bewailing at this moment his separation from you."

" Ah ! I'd pity him if I had time ! " she said.

" He was fond of you ? "

" Don't speak of it."

" If he had not been fond of you, he would not have placed you here."

Madame Zélie made a grimace of equivocal meaning. " That is not much of a proof," she murmured.

" He would not have spent so much money on you."

" For me ! " she interrupted, " for me ! What have I cost him of any consequence ? Is it for me that he bought, furnished, and fitted out this house ? No, no ! He had the cage ; and he put in a bird, the first he happened to find. He brought me here as he might have brought any other woman, young or old, pretty or ugly, blonde or brunette. As to what I spent here it was a mere bagatelle compared with what the other spent,—the one before me. Amanda kept telling me all the time I was a fool. You may believe me, then, when I tell you that M. Vincent will not wet many handkerchiefs with the tears he'll shed thinking of me."

" But do you know what became of the one before you, as you call her, whether she is alive or dead, and owing to what circumstances the cage became empty ? "

But instead of answering, Madame Zélie fixed upon Marius de Trégars a suspicious glance. And, after a moment she said : " Why do you ask me that ? "

" I would like to know—"

She did not allow him to proceed. Rising from her seat and stepping briskly up to him, she asked in a tone of distrust : " Do you happen to belong to the police ? "

If she was anxious, it was evidently because she had motives of anxiety which she had concealed, a secret which she desired to keep. If the idea of police had come into her mind it was because very probably, she had been recommended to be on her guard. M. de Trégars understood all this, and also that he had tried to proceed too fast. " Do I look like a detective ? " he replied with a forced smile.

She examined him with all her power of penetration. " Not at all, I confess," she said. " But, if you are not one how is it that you come to my house without knowing me from Adam, to ask me a whole lot of questions which I am a fool enough to answer ? "

" I told you I am a friend of M. Favoral."

" Who's that, Favoral ? "

" That is M. Vincent's real name, madame."

She opened her eyes wide. " You must be mistaken. I never heard him call anything but Vincent."

" It is because he had especial motives for concealing his personality. The money he spent here did not belong to him, he took it, he stole it from the Mutual Credit Bank where he was cashier, and where he has left a deficit of twelve millions."

Madame Zélie stepped back as though she had trodden on a snake. " It's impossible ! " she cried.

" It is the exact truth. Haven't you seen in the papers the case of Vin-

cent Favoral, cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank?" And, taking a newspaper from his pocket, he handed it to the young woman, saying, "Read."

But she pushed it back, not without a slight blush. "Oh, I believe you!" she said. The fact is, and Marius understood it, she did not read very fluently.

"The worst of M. Vincent Favoral's conduct," he resumed, "is, that, while he was throwing away money here by the handful, he subjected his family to the most cruel privations."

"Oh!"

"He refused the necessities of life to his wife, the best and the worthiest of women; he never gave a sou to his son; and he deprived his daughter of everything."

"Ah, if I could have suspected such a thing!" murmured Madame Zélie.

"Finally, and to cap the climax, he has gone, leaving his wife and children literally without bread."

"Why, that man must be a horrible old scoundrel!" exclaimed the young woman indignantly.

This was just the point to which M. de Trégars wished to bring her. "And now," he resumed, "you must understand the enormous interest we have in knowing what has become of him."

"I have already told you."

M. de Trégars had risen, in his turn. Taking Madame Zélie's hands, he fixed upon her one of those penetrating looks, which search for the truth down to the innermost recesses of the conscience: "Come, my dear child," he pleaded, "you are an honest girl. Will you leave in the most frightful despair a family who appeal to your heart? Be sure that no harm will ever happen through us to Vincent Favoral."

She raised her hand, as is done in taking an oath in a French court of justice, and, in a solemn tone, she said: "I swear that I went to the railway station with M. Vincent; that he assured me that he was going to Brazil; that he had his passage-ticket; and that on all his luggage was marked, 'Rio de Janeiro.'"

The disappointment was great; and M. de Trégars manifested it by a gesture. "At least," he insisted, "tell me who the woman was whose place you took here."

But already had the young woman returned to her feeling of mistrust. "How in the world do you expect me to know?" she replied. "Go and ask Amanda. I have no accounts to render you. Besides, I have to go and finish packing my trunks. So good-bye, and enjoy yourself!" And she went out so quick, that she almost upset Amanda, the chambermaid, who was kneeling behind the door.

"So that woman was listening, thought M. de Trégars, anxious and dissatisfied. But it was in vain that he begged Madame Zélie to return, and hear a single word more. She disappeared; and he was obliged to leave the house without learning anything more for the moment. He had remained there very long; and he was wondering, as he walked out, whether Maxence had not got tired waiting for him in the little café where he had left him. But Maxence had remained faithfully at his post. And when Marius de Trégars came to sit by him, whilst exclaiming, "Here you are at last!" he called his attention at the same time with a wink to two men sitting at the adjoining table before a bowl of punch. Certain now, that M. de Trégars would remain on the lookout, Maxence knocked on the table with his

fist, to call the waiter, who was busy playing billiards with a customer. And when he came at last, justly annoyed at being disturbed, Maxence requested him to bring some beer and a pack of cards.

M. de Trégars understood very well that something extraordinary had happened; but, unable to guess what, he leaned over towards his companion. "What is it?" he whispered.

"We must hear what these two men say while we pretend to play a game of piquet."

The waiter returned, bringing two glasses of a muddy liquid, a piece of cloth, the colour of which was concealed under a layer of dirt, and a pack of cards horribly soft and greasy.

"My deal," said Maxence. And he shuffled and dealt the cards, whilst M. de Trégars examined the punch-drinkers at the next table. In one of the two, a man still young, wearing a striped vest with alpaca sleeves, he thought he recognized one of the rascally-looking fellows he had caught a glimpse of in Madame Zélie Cadelle's coach-house. The other, an old man, whose inflamed complexion and blossoming nose betrayed old habits of drunkenness, looked very much like a coachman out of place. Baseness and duplicity bloomed upon his countenance; and the brightness of his small eyes rendered still more alarming the slyly obsequious smile that was stereotyped upon his thin and pale lips. They were so completely absorbed in their conversation, that they paid no attention whatever to what was going on around them.

"Then," the old one was saying, "it's all over."

"Entirely. The house is sold."

"And the master?"

"Gone to America."

"What! Suddenly like that!"

"No. We supposed he was going on some journey, because, every day since the beginning of the week, they were bringing in trunks and boxes; but no one knew exactly when he would go. But on Saturday night he dropped in the house like a bombshell, woke up everybody, and said he must leave immediately. At once we harness the horses, we drive him and his luggage to the Western Railway Station, and good-bye, Vincent!"

"And the missis?"

"She's got to clear out in the next twenty-four hours; but she don't seem to mind it one bit. The fact is, we are the ones who grieve the most, after all."

"Is it possible?"

"It is so. She was a good girl; and we won't soon find one like her."

The old man seemed distressed. "Bad luck!" he growled. "I would have liked that house myself."

"Oh, I dare say you would."

"And there is no way of getting in now?"

"Can't tell. It will be well to see the others, the new comers. But I mistrust them; they look too stupid not to be mean."

Listening intently to the conversation of these two men, it was mechanically and at random that M. de Trégars and Maxence threw their cards on the table, and uttered the common terms of the game of piquet: "Five cards! Quart major! Three aces."

Meantime the old man continued: "Who knows but what M. Vincent may come back?"

"No danger of that!"

"Why?"

The other looked carefully around, and, seeing only two players absorbed in their game, he replied: "Because M. Vincent is completely ruined, it seems. He has spent all his own money, and a good deal of other people's money besides. Amanda, the chambermaid, told us so, and I am sure she knows."

"You thought he was so rich!"

"He was. But no matter how big the bag is, if you keep taking out of it, you must at last get to the bottom."

"Then he spent a great deal?"

"It's incredible! I have been in extravagant houses; but nowhere have I ever seen money fly as it has during the five months that I have been in that house. A regular pillage! Everybody helped themselves; and what was not in the house, they could get from the tradespeople, have it charged on the bill; and it was all paid without a word."

"Then, yes, indeed, the money must have gone pretty lively," said the old fellow in a tone of conviction.

"Well," rejoined the other, "that wasn't the worst. Amanda, the chambermaid, who has been in the house fifteen years, told us some stories that would make you jump. Zélie did not spend much; but some of the others, it seems—"

It required the greatest effort on the part of Maxence and M. de Trégars not to play, but only to pretend to play, and to continue to count imaginary points, "One, two, three, four."

Fortunately the coachman with the red nose seemed much interested. "What others?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," replied the young valet. "But you may imagine that there must have been more than one in that little house during the many years that M. Vincent owned it. A man who hadn't his equal for women, and who was worth millions!"

"And what was his business?"

"Don't know that, either."

"What! there were ten of you in the house and you didn't know the profession of the man who paid you all?"

"We were all new."

"The chambermaid, Amanda, must have known."

"When she was asked, she said that he was a merchant. One thing is certain, he was a queer old chap."

So interested was the old coachman, that, seeing the punch-bowl empty, he called for another. His comrade could not fail to show his appreciation of such politeness. "Ah, yes!" he went on, "old Vincent was an eccentric fellow; and never, to see him, could you have suspected that he cut such capers, and that he threw money away by the handful."

"Indeed!"

"Imagine a man about fifty years old, stiff as a post, with a face about as pleasant as a prison-gate. That was the governor! Summer and winter, he wore laced shoes, blue stockings, grey trousers that were too short, a cotton necktie, and a frock-coat that came down to his ankles. In the street you would have taken him for a hosier who had retired before making his fortune."

"You don't say so!"

"Never have I seen a man look so much like an old miser. You think, perhaps, that he came in a carriage. Not a bit of it! He came on the

omnibus, my boy, and outside too, for three sous ; and when it rained he opened his umbrella. But the moment he had crossed the threshold of the house, presto, pass ! complete change of scene. The miser became pacha. He took off his old clothes, put on a blue velvet dressing-gown ; and then there was nothing handsome enough, nothing good enough, nothing expensive enough, for him. And, when he had acted the wealthy lord to his heart's content, he put on his old clothes again, resumed his prison-gate face, climbed up on to the top of an omnibus, and went off as he came."

"And you were not surprised, all of you, at such a life?"

"Very much so."

"And you did not think that these singular whims must conceal something?"

"Oh, but we did !"

"And you didn't try to find out what that something was?"

"How could we?"

"Was it very difficult to follow your governor, and ascertain where he went, after leaving the house?"

"Certainly not ; but what then?"

"Why," replied the old coachman shrugging his shoulders, "you would have found out this secret sooner or later ; and then you might have gone to him and said : 'Give me so much, or I'll peach.'"

IV.

THIS history of M. Vincent, as told by the two worthy fellows, was something like the vulgar legend of other people's money, so eagerly coveted, and so madly dissipated. Easily-obtained wealth is easily got rid of. Stolen money has fatal tendencies, and turns irresistibly to gambling and fast women, all the ruinous fancies, all the unwholesome gratifications. Those to whom their ill-gotten gain proves of real service are rare indeed among the daring cut-throats of speculation ; so rare that they are pointed out, and are as easily numbered as the girls who leap some night from the street to a ten-thousand-franc apartment, and manage to remain there. Seized with the intoxication of sudden wealth, they lose all measure and all prudence. Whether they believe their luck inexhaustible, or fear a sudden turn of fortune, they make haste to enjoy themselves, and they fill the noted restaurants, the leading cafés, the theatres, the clubs, the race-courses, with their impudent personality, the noise of their voice, the extravagance of their mistresses and the absurdity of their vanity. And they go on and on, squandering other people's money, until the fatal hour of one of those disastrous liquidations which terrify the courts and the exchange ; until the moment when they have the choice between a pistol-shot, which they never choose, the criminal court, which they do their best to avoid, and a trip abroad. What becomes of them afterwards ? Into what gutters do they eventually roll ? Does any one know what becomes of the women who suddenly disappear, after two or three years of follies and of splendours ? But it happens sometimes, as you step out of a carriage at the entrance of some theatre, that you wonder where you have already seen the face of the wretched beggar who opens the door for you, and in a husky voice claims his two sous. You saw him at the Café Riche, during the six months that he was a big financier. Some other time you may catch, in the crowd, snatches of a strange conversation between two drunken scoundrels : "It

was at the time," says one, "when I had that pair of bright chestnuts that I bought for twenty thousand francs of the eldest son of the Duke de Sermeuse." "I remember," replies the other; "for at that moment I was allowing little Cabirole six thousand francs a month." And, improbable as this may seem, it is the exact truth; for one was manager of a manufacturing enterprise that swallowed up ten millions and the other was at the head of a financial operation that ruined five hundred families. They had houses like the one in the Rue du Cirque, mistresses more expensive than Madame Zélie Cadelle, and servants like those who were talking within a few steps of Maxence and Marius de Trégars.

The two men had resumed their conversation; and the old one, the coachman with the red nose, was saying to his younger comrade: "This Vincent affair should be a lesson to you. If ever you find yourself again in a house where so much money is spent, remember that it cannot have given much trouble to earn, and manage somehow to get as big a share of it as you can."

"That's what I've always done wherever I have been."

"And, above all, make haste to fill your pockets, because, you see, in houses like that, one is never sure one day, whether the next, the gentleman will not be in Mazas, and the lady in St. Lazare." They had finished their second bowl of punch, so they paid, and left.

Maxence and M. de Trégars were able, at last, to throw down their cards. Maxence was very pale; and bitter tears filled his eyes. "What a disgrace!" he murmured. "This, then is the other side of my father's existence! This is the way in which he spent the millions which he stole; whilst, in the Rue St. Gilles, he deprived his family of the necessities of life!" And, in a tone of utter discouragement, he added: "Now it is indeed all over, and it is useless to continue our search. My father is certainly guilty."

But M. de Trégars was not the man thus to give up the game. "Guilty? Yes," he said; "but dupe also."

"Whose dupe?"

"That's what we must try to find out."

"What! after what we have just heard?"

"I have more hope than ever."

"Did you learn anything then from Madame Zélie Cadelle?"

"Nothing more than you know by those two rascal's conversation." A dozen questions were pressing upon Maxence's lips; but M. de Trégars resumed: "In this case, my friend, we must not trust appearances. Let me explain. Was your father a simpleton? No! His ability to dissimulate for years, his double existence, prove, on the contrary, a wonderful amount of duplicity. How is it, then, that latterly his conduct has been so extraordinary and so absurd? You will perhaps say it was always such. But no; for then his secret would not have been one for a year. We hear that other women lived in that house before Madame Zélie Cadelle; but that is only a rumour. Who were they? What has become of them? Is there any certainty that they ever existed? Nothing proves it. The servants having been all changed, Amanda, the chambermaid, is the only one who knows the truth; and she will be very careful to say nothing about it. Therefore, all our positive information goes back no farther than five months. And what do we learn? That your father seemed to try and make his extravagant expenditure as conspicuous as possible. That he did not even take the trouble to conceal the source of the money he spent so profusely

for he told Madame Zélie that he was at the end of his tether, and that, after having spent his own fortune, he was spending other people's money. He announced his intended departure some days before it took place; he had sold the house, and received its price. Finally, at the last moment, what does he do? Instead of going off quietly and secretly, like a man who is running away and who knows that he is pursued, he tells every one where he intends to go; he writes it on all his trunks, in letters half a foot high; and then rides in great display to the railway station, with a woman, several carriages, servants, and I don't know how many trunks. What is the object of all this? To get caught? No; but to start a false scent. Therefore, everything must have been arranged in his mind beforehand, and the catastrophe was far from taking him by surprise; the scene with M. de Thaller must have been prepared; and it must have been on purpose that he left his pocket-book behind, with the bill in it that was to lead us straight here. All we have seen therefore is but a transparent comedy got up for our special benefit, intended to hide the truth and mislead the law."

But Maxence was not entirely convinced. "Still," he remarked, "those enormous expenses."

M. de Trégars shrugged his shoulders. "Have you any idea," he asked, "what display can be made with a million? Let us admit that your father has spent two, four millions even. The loss of the Mutual Credit Bank is twelve millions. What has become of the other eight?" And as Maxence made no answer. "It is those eight millions," he added, "that I want and that I shall have. It is in Paris that your father is hiding, I feel certain. We must find him; and we must make him tell us the truth, which I already more than suspect." Whereupon, throwing on the table the price of the beer which he had not drunk, he walked out of the café with Maxence.

"Here you are at last!" exclaimed the cabman, who had been waiting at the corner for over three hours a prey to the utmost anxiety. But M. de Trégars had no time for explanations; and pushing Maxence into the cab he jumped in after him, saying to the driver: "24 Rue Joquelet. Drive fast and you shall have five francs extra for yourself." A driver who expects an extra five francs, always has for five minutes at least, a horse as fast as Gladiateur.

"What is most important for us now," said M. de Trégars to Maxence as the cab was speeding on to its destination, "is to ascertain how far the crisis of the Mutual Credit Bank has progressed; and M. Lattermann of the Rue Joquelet is the man in all Paris who can best inform us."

Whoever has made or lost five hundred francs on the Bourse knows M. Lattermann who, since the war calls himself an Alsatian, and curses with a fearful accent those "parparous" Prussians. This worthy speculator modestly calls himself a money changer; but he would be a simpleton who should ask him for change. It is certainly not that sort of business which returns him the three hundred thousand francs' profits which he pockets every year. When a company has failed, when it has been wound up and the defrauded shareholders have received two or three per cent in all on their original investments, there is a prevailing idea that the certificates of its shares are no longer good for anything except to light the fire. That's a mistake. Long after the company has ceased to exist, its shares float like the wreckage which the sea casts upon the beach months after the ship has foundered. These shares M. Lattermann collects and carefully stores away; and upon the shelves of his office you may see boxes containing innumerable shares and

bonds of those various companies which have absorbed in the past twenty years, according to some statistics, twelve hundred millions, and according to others two milliards of the public fortune. Say but a word, and his clerks will offer you some "Franco-Servian Company," some Steam Navigation Company of Marseilles," some "Coal and Metal Company of the Asturias," some "Trans-continental Memphis and El Paso (United States)," some "Caumon Slate Works," and hundreds of others which, for the general public have no value, save that of old paper, which is from three to five sous a pound. And yet speculators are found who buy and sell these rags. In an obscure corner of the Bourse may be seen a miscellaneous population of old men with pointed beards, and overdressed young men, who deal in everything saleable and other things besides. There are found foreign merchants, who will offer you businesses for sale, a bankrupt's stock in trade, good claims to recover, and who at last will take out of their pockets an opera-glass, a Geneva watch smuggled in, a revolver, or a bottle of patent hair-restorer. Such is the market to which drift those shares which were once issued to represent millions, and which now represent nothing but a palpable proof of the audacity of swindlers, and the credulity of their dupes. And there are actually buyers for these shares, and they go up or down, according to the ordinary laws of supply and demand; for there is a demand for them, and here comes in the usefulness of M. Lattermann's business. Does a tradesman on the eve of declaring himself bankrupt wish to defraud his creditors of a part of his assets, to conceal excessive expenses or cover up some embezzlement, he at once goes to the Rue Joquelet, procures a select assortment of "Cantonal Credit," "Rossdorff Mines," or "Maurusson Salt Works," and puts them carefully away in his safe. And when the receiver arrives, "There are my assets," he says. "I have there some twenty, fifty, or a hundred thousand francs worth of shares, the whole of which is not worth five francs to-day; but it isn't my fault. I thought them a good investment; and I didn't sell when there was a chance of doing so, because I always thought the price would go up again." And he gets his discharge, for it would really be too cruel to punish a man simply because he has made unfortunate investments. Better than any one M. Lattermann knows for what purpose are purchased the valueless securities which he sells; and he actually advises his customers which to take in preference in order that their purchase at the time of their issue may appear more natural and more likely. Nevertheless, he claims to be a perfectly honest man, and declares that he is no more responsible for the swindles that are perpetrated by means of his worthless shares than a gunsmith for a murder committed with a gun that he has sold.

"He will surely be able to tell us all about the state of the Mutual Credit Bank," M. de Trégars kept repeating to Maxence.

Four o'clock struck as the cab stopped in the Rue Joquelet. The Bourse had just closed; and a few groups were still standing about the Place or leaning against the railings.

"I hope we shall find this Lattermann at home" said Maxence.

They went up-stairs, for it is on the second floor that this worthy operator has his offices; and inquired for him. "M. Lattermann is engaged with a customer," answered a clerk. "Please to take a seat and wait."

M. Lattermann's office was like all other dens of the same kind. A very narrow space was reserved to the public; and all around, behind a heavy wire screen the clerks could be seen busy adding up figures, or handling coupons. On the right, over a small wicket, appeared the word "CASHIER." A door on the left led to the private office. M. de Trégars and Maxence sat

down patiently on a hard leather seat, once red ; and they listened and looked on. There was considerable animation about the place. Every few minutes well-dressed young men came in with a hurried and important look, and taking from their pocket a memorandum-book, they would speak a few sentences of that peculiar dialect, bristling with figures, which is the language of the Bourse.

"Will M. Lattermann be engaged much longer ?" inquired M. de Trégars at the end of fifteen or twenty minutes.

"I do not know," replied a clerk.

At that very moment the little door on the left opened, and the customer who had detained M. Lattermann so long came out. This customer was no other than M. Costeclar. Noticing M. de Trégars and Maxence, who had risen at the noise of the door opening, he appeared most disagreeably surprised. He even turned slightly pale and took a step backwards, as if in tending to return precipitately into the room that he was leaving ; for M. Lattermann's office, like that of all other large operators had several doors without counting the one that leads to the police-court. But M. de Trégars gave him no time to effect this retreat. Stepping suddenly forward, "Well ?" he asked him in a tone that was almost threatening.

The brilliant financier had condescended to take off his hat usually riveted upon his head, and with the smile of a knave caught in the act, he said : "I did not expect to meet you here, marquis."

At the title of "marquis," everybody looked up.

"I believe you, indeed," said M. de Trégars. "But what I want to know is, how is the matter progressing ?"

"The plot is thickening. Justice is acting."

"Really !"

"It is a fact. Jules Jottras, of the firm of Jottras and Brother was arrested this morning just as he arrived at the Bourse."

"Why ?"

"Because, it seems, he was an accomplice of Favoral ; and it was he who sold the bonds stolen from the Mutual Credit Bank."

Maxence had started at the mention of his father's name ; but with a significant glance, M. de Trégars bid him remain silent, and in a sarcastic tone, "What a famous capture !" he murmured. "And which proves the clear-sightedness of justice."

"But this is not all," resumed M. Costeclar. "Saint-Pavin, the editor of 'The Financial Pilot,' you know, is thought to be seriously compromised. There was a rumour at the close of the Bourse, that a warrant either had been, or was about to be issued against him."

"And the Baron de Thaller ?"

The employees of the office could not help being surprised at M. Costeclar's extraordinary amount of patience.

"The baron," he replied, "made his appearance at the Bourse this afternoon and was the object of a veritable ovation."

"That is admirable ! And what did he say ?"

"That the damage was already repaired."

"Then the shares of the Mutual Credit Bank have gone up again."

"Unfortunately, no. They did not go above one hundred and ten francs."

"Are you not astonished at that ?"

"Not much, because you see, I am a business man ; and I know pretty well how things work. When they left M. de Thaller this morning, the shareholders of the Mutual Credit Bank had a meeting ; and they pledged

themselves, upon honour, not to sell, so as not to break the market. As soon as they had separated, each one said to himself, 'Since the others are going to keep their shares, like fools, I may as well sell mine.' Now, as there were three or four hundred of them who argued in the same way, the market was flooded with shares."

Looking the brilliant financier straight in the eyes, "And yourself?" interrupted M. de Trégars.

"I!" stammered M. Costeclar so visibly agitated, that the clerks could not help laughing.

"Yes. I wish to know if you have been more faithful to your word than the shareholders of whom you are speaking, and whether you have done as we had agreed."

"Certainly; and, if you find me here—"

But M. de Trégars, placing his hand on the other's shoulder, stopped his further protestations. "I think I know what brought you here," he exclaimed; "and in a few moments I shall have ascertained."

"I swear to you."

"Don't swear. If I am mistaken, so much the better for you. If I am not mistaken, I'll prove to you that it is dangerous to try any sharp game on me, though I am not a business man."

Meantime, M. Lattermann, seeing no customer come to take the place of the one who had left, became impatient at last, and appeared upon the threshold of his private office. He was a middle-aged man, small, thickset, and vulgar. At the first glance, nothing of him could be seen but his abdomen, a large and ponderous abdomen, seat of his thoughts, and tabernacle of his aspirations, over which dangled a massive gold chain, loaded with trinkets. Above an apoplectic neck, red as that of a turkey-cock, rose his little head, covered with coarse, red hair, cut very short. He wore a heavy beard, trimmed in the form of a fan. His large, full-moon face was divided in two by a nose as flat as a Kalmuck's and illuminated by two small eyes, in which could be read the most thorough duplicity.

"Why! you know each other!" he said, seeing M. de Trégars and M. Costeclar engaged in conversation.

M. de Trégars advanced a step. "We are even—intimate friends," he replied. "And it is very lucky that we have met. I am brought here by the same matter as our dear Costeclar, and I was just explaining to him that he has been too hasty, and that it would be better to wait three or four days longer."

"That's just what I told him," echoed the worthy financier.

Maxence understood only one thing, that M. de Trégars had penetrated M. Costeclar's designs; and he could not sufficiently admire his presence of mind, and his skill in grasping an unexpected opportunity.

"Fortunately, there is nothing done yet," continued M. Lattermann.

"And it is yet time to alter what has been agreed on," said M. de Trégars. And, addressing himself to Costeclar, he added: "Come, we will settle everything with M. Lattermann."

But the other, who remembered the scene in the Rue St. Gilles, and who had his own reasons to be alarmed, would sooner have jumped out of the window. "I am expected," he stammered. "Arrange matters without me."

"Then you give me *carte-blanc*?"

Ah, if the brilliant financier had dared. But he felt riveted upon him—such threatening eyes that he dared not even make a gesture of denial.

"Whatever you do will be satisfactory," he said in the tone of a man who feels himself lost.

And, as he made towards the door, M. de Trégars stepped into M. Lattermann's private office. He remained only five minutes; and soon rejoined Maxence, whom he had begged to wait for him. "I think that we have them," he said as they walked off.

Their next visit was to M. Saint-Pavin, at the office of "The Financial Pilot." Every one must have seen at least one copy of that paper, with its ingenious vignette, representing a bold mariner steering a boat, filled with timid passengers, towards the harbour of Millions, over a stormy sea, bristling with the rocks of failure and the shoals of ruin. The offices of "The Pilot," are, in fact, less newspaper offices than a sort of general business agency. As at M. Lattermann's, there were clerks scribbling behind wire screens, a cashier, and an immense black-board, on which the latest quotations of the Rente, and other French and foreign securities, were written in chalk. As "The Pilot" spends some hundred thousand francs a year in advertising in order to obtain subscribers; as, on the other hand, it only costs three francs a year, it is clear that it is not on its subscriptions that it realises any profits. It has other sources of income: its brokerages first; for it buys, sells, and executes, as the prospectus says, all orders for stocks, bonds, or other securities, to the best advantage of the client. And it has plenty of business. To the opulent brokerages, must be added advertising and puffing, another mine. Six times out of ten, when a new enterprise is set on foot, the organizers send for Saint-Pavin. Honest men, or knaves, they must all pass through his hands. They know it, and are resigned in advance. "We rely upon you," they say to him. "What advantages have you to offer?" he replies. Then they discuss the operation, the expected profits of the new company, and M. Saint-Pavin's demands. For a hundred thousand francs he promises to do his utmost; for fifty thousand he will be enthusiastic only. Twenty thousand francs will secure a moderate praise of the affair; ten thousand, a friendly neutrality. And, if the said company refuses any advantages to "The Pilot," "Ah, take care!" says Saint-Pavin. And in his very next number he commences his campaign. He is moderate at first, and leaves a door open for his retreat. He expresses doubts only. He does not know much about it. It may be an excellent affair; it may be quite the reverse: the safest is to wait and see. That's the first summons. If it remains without result, he takes up his pen again, and makes his doubts more pointed. He knows how to steer clear of libel suits, how to handle figures so as to demonstrate, according to the requirements of the case, that two and two make three, or make five. It is seldom, that, before the third article, the company does not surrender at discretion. All Paris knows him; and he has many friends.

When M. de Trégars and Maxence arrived, they found the office full of people: speculators, brokers, go-betweens, come here to discuss the fluctuations of the day and the probabilities of the evening market. "M. Saint-Pavin is engaged," one of the clerks told them.

Indeed, his coarse voice could be distinctly heard behind the screen. Soon he appeared, showing out an old gentleman, who seemed utterly confused at the scene, and to whom he was shouting: "No, sir, no! 'The Financial Pilot' does not undertake that sort of business; and I consider you very bold to come and propose to me such a twopenny rascality." But, noticing Maxence, he said: "M. Favoral! By Jove! it is my good star that has

brought you here. Come into the private office, my dear sir, come, we'll have some fun now."

Many of the people who were waiting had a word to say to M. Saint-Pavin, some advice to ask him, an order to transmit, or some news to communicate. They had all stepped forward, and were holding out their hands with friendly smiles. He motioned them aside with his usual rudeness. "By and by. I am busy now! Leave me alone."

And pulling Maxence towards the office-door which he had just opened. "Come in, come in!" he said in a tone of extraordinary impatience.

But M. de Trégars was entering too; and as he did not know him, he asked roughly: "What do you want, you?"

"The gentleman is my best friend," said Maxence, turning to him; "and I have no secret from him."

"Let him come in, then; but by heaven make haste!"

Once very sumptuous the private office of the editor of "The Financial Pilot" had fallen into a state of sordid dilapidation. If the office-boy had received orders never to use a broom or a duster there, he obeyed them strictly. Disorder and dirt reigned supreme. Papers and manuscripts lay about in all directions; and on the broad sofas the mud from the boots of all those who had lounged upon them had been drying for months. On the mantelpiece in the midst of some half-dozen dirty glasses, stood a bottle of Madeira nearly empty. Finally, before the fireplace, on the carpet, and on the edges of the tables, cigar and cigarette stumps were heaped in profusion.

As soon as he had bolted the door, M. Saint-Pavin went straight to Maxence, and asked roughly: "What has become of your father?"

Maxence started. That was the last question he expected to hear. "I do not know," he replied.

The editor of "The Financial Pilot" shrugged his shoulders. "That you should say so to the commissary of police, to the investigating magistrate, and to all Favoral's enemies, I understand, it is your duty. That they should believe you, I understand too; for, after all, what do they care? But to me, a friend, though you may not think so, and who has reasons not to be credulous—"

"I swear to you that we have no idea where he has taken refuge."

Maxence said this with such an accent of sincerity, that doubt was no longer possible. M. Saint-Pavin's features expressed the utmost surprise. "What!" he exclaimed, "your father has gone off without securing the means of hearing from his family?"

"Yes."

"Without saying a word of his intentions to your mother, or your sister, or yourself?"

"Without a word."

"Without leaving any money, perhaps?"

"We found only an insignificant sum after he left."

The editor of "The Financial Pilot" made a gesture of ironical admiration. "Well, the thing is complete," he said; "and Vincent is a smarter fellow than I thought; or else he must have cared more for those infernal women of his than any one supposed."

M. de Trégars, who had remained hitherto silent, now stepped forward. "What women?" he asked.

"How do I know?" replied the editor roughly. "How could any one ever find out anything about a man who was more hermetically shut up in his coat than a Jesuit in his cassock?"

"M. Costeclar—"

"He's another nice chicken! Still he may possibly have discovered something of Vincent's life; for he led him a pretty dance. Wasn't he on the point of marrying Mademoiselle Favoral once?"

"Yes, in spite of herself even."

"Then you are right; he had discovered something. But if you rely on him to tell you anything whatever, you are reckoning without your host."

"Who knows?" murmured M. de Trégars.

But M. Saint-Pavin heard him not. Prey to a violent agitation, he was pacing up and down the room. "Ah, those men of cold appearance," he growled, "those discreet-looking fellows, those close-shaving calculators, those moralists! What fools they do make of themselves when once started! Who can imagine to what insane extremities this one may have been driven under the spur of some mad passion!" And violently stamping his foot upon the carpet, from which arose clouds of dust, "I must find him however," he swore, "and, by thunder! wherever he may be hid I will find him."

M. de Trégars was watching M. Saint-Pavin with a scrutinizing eye. "You have a great interest in finding him, then?" he said.

"I have the interest," replied the other, "of a man who thought himself shrewd, and who has been taken in like a child; of a man to whom wonders had been promised, and who finds his situation imperilled; of a man who is tired of working for a band of brigands who heap up millions upon millions, and to whom, for all reward, they offer the police-court and the prospect of a retreat in the prison of Poissy for his old age; in a word, the interest of a man who longs for and will have revenge, by all that's holy!"

"On whom?"

"On the Baron de Thaller, sir! How in the world has he been able to compel Favoral to assume the responsibility of all and to disappear? What enormous sum has he given to him?"

"Sir," interrupted Maxence, "my father went off without a sou."

M. Saint-Pavin burst out laughing. "And the twelve millions?" he asked. "What has become of them? Do you suppose they have been distributed in charity?" And without waiting for any further objections he went on: "But it is not with money alone that a man can be induced to disgrace himself, to confess himself a thief and a forger, to brave the galleys, to give up everything, country, family, friends! Evidently the Baron de Thaller must have had other means of action, some hold on Favoral—"

M. de Trégars interrupted him. "You speak," he said, "as if you were absolutely certain of M. de Thaller's complicity."

"Of course."

"Why don't you inform on him, then?"

The editor of "The Financial Pilot" started back. "What!" he exclaimed, "mix the law up with my own business! You can't mean it! Besides, what good would it do me? I have no proofs of my allegations. Do you suppose that De Thaller has not taken his precautions, and tied my hands? No, no! without Favoral there is nothing to be done."

"Do you suppose, then, that you could induce him to surrender himself?"

"No, but to furnish me the proofs I need to send De Thaller where they have already sent that poor Jottras." And becoming more and more excited, "But it is not in a month that I should want those proofs," he went on, "nor even in a week, but now, at this very moment. Before the end

of the week De Thaller will have wound up the operation, realized, heaven only knows how many millions, and put everything in such nice order, that justice, who in financial matters is not of the first capacity, will discover nothing wrong. If De Thaller gets as far as that, he will be safe, he will be beyond reach, and will be dubbed a first-class financier. Then to what may he not aspire ! Already he talks of having himself elected deputy ; and he says everywhere that he has found a husband for his daughter, a nobleman who bears one of the oldest names in France, the Marquis de Trégars."

"Why, this is the Marquis de Trégars !" exclaimed Maxence, pointing to Marius.

For the first time M. Saint-Pavin took the trouble to examine his other visitor ; and he, who knew life too well not to be a judge of men, he seemed surprised. "Please excuse me, sir," he said with a politeness very different from his usual manner, "and permit me to ask you if you know the reasons why M. de Thaller is so prodigiously anxious to have you for a son-in-law."

"I think," replied M. de Trégars coldly, "that M. de Thaller would not be sorry to deprive me of the right to seek the causes of my father's ruin."

But he was interrupted by a great noise of voices in the adjoining room ; and directly after there was a loud knock at the door, and some one called out : "In the name of the law !"

The editor of "The Financial Pilot" had become whiter than his shirt. "That's what I was afraid of," he said. "De Thaller has got ahead of me ; and perhaps I am lost." Meantime he did not lose his wits. Quick as thought he took out of a drawer a bundle of letters, threw them into the grate, and set fire to them, saying, in a voice rendered hoarse by emotion and anger : "No one shall enter the room until these papers are burnt." But it required a long time to make them catch fire. M. Saint-Pavin had knelt before the hearth, and was stirring them up and scattering them to make them burn faster.

"Now," asked M. de Trégars, "do you hesitate to deliver up the Baron de Thaller to justice?"

"Now," replied the editor with flashing eyes, "if I wish to save myself, I must save him too. Don't you understand that he holds me?" And, seeing that the last sheets of his correspondence were consumed, "You may open," he said to Maxence.

Maxence obeyed, and a commissary of police, wearing his scarf of office, rushed into the room ; whilst his men, not without difficulty, kept back the crowd in the outer office. The commissary, who was an old hand and had perhaps been on a hundred expeditions of this kind, had taken in the scene at a glance. Noticing in the fireplace the burnt paper upon which still fluttered an expiring flame, he said : "That's the reason, then, why you were so long opening the door."

A sarcastic smile played upon the editor's lips : "Private matters," he explained, "women's letters."

"This will be moral evidence against you, sir."

"I prefer it to material evidence."

Without condescending to notice the impertinence, the commissary cast a suspicious glance on Maxence and M. de Trégars. "Who are these gentlemen who were closeted with you?" he asked.

"Visitors. This gentleman is M. Favoral."

"The son of the cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank?"

"Exactly ; and this gentleman is the Marquis de Trégars."

"They should have opened the door when they heard me knock in the name of the law," grumbled the commissary. But he let the matter drop. Taking a paper from his pocket he opened it, and handing it to M. Saint-Pavin, "I have orders to arrest you," he said. "Here is the warrant."

With a careless gesture the other pushed it back. "What's the use of reading?" he said. "When I heard of the arrest of poor Jottras, I guessed at once what was in store for me. It is about the Mutual Credit Bank swindle, I imagine."

"Exactly."

"I have no more to do with it than you yourself, sir; and I shall have very little trouble in proving it. But that is not your business, and you are going, I suppose, to put the seals on my papers?"

"Except on those that you have burnt."

M. Saint-Pavin burst out laughing. He had recovered his coolness and his impudence, and seemed as much at ease as if what was taking place was the most natural thing in the world. "Shall I be allowed to speak to my clerks," he asked, "and to give them my instructions?"

"Yes," replied the commissary, "but in my presence."

The clerks, being called, appeared, consternation depicted upon their countenances, but joy sparkling in their eyes. In reality they were delighted at the misfortune which had befallen their employer.

"You see what happens to me, my lads," he said. "But don't be uneasy. In less than forty-eight hours the error of which I am the victim will be recognized, or I shall be liberated on bail. At any rate, I can rely upon you, can't I?" They all swore that they would be more attentive and more zealous than ever. And then addressing himself to his cashier, who was his confidential and right-hand man, he added: "As to you, Besnard, you will run to M. de Thaller's and inform him of what's going on. Let him have funds ready; for all our depositors will want to draw out their money at once. You will then call at the printing-office: have my article on the Mutual Credit Bank broken up, and insert in its place some financial news cut from the other papers. Above all, don't mention my arrest, unless M. de Thaller should insist upon it. Go at once, and let the paper appear as usual, that's the main thing."

He had, whilst speaking, lighted a cigar. The honest man, victim of human iniquity, could not have had a firmer and more tranquil countenance. "Justice does not know," he said to the commissary, who was fumbling in all the drawers of the writing-table, "what irreparable damage she may cause by arresting so hastily a man like me, who has charge of immense interests. It is the fortune of ten or twelve thousand small capitalists that is put in jeopardy."

Already the witnesses of the arrest had retired, one by one, to go and scatter the news along the Boulevard, and also to see what could be made out of it; for, at the Bourse, news is money. M. de Trégars and Maxence left also. As they passed the door M. Saint-Pavin said to them: "Don't you say anything about what I told you."

M. de Trégars made no answer. He had the contracted features and tightly-drawn lips of a man who is considering a grave determination, which, once taken, will be irrevocable. Once in the street, and when Maxence had opened the cab door, he said to him: "We are going to separate here. I know enough now to venture to call at M. de Thaller's. There only shall I be able to see how to strike the decisive blow. Return to the Rue St. Gilles and relieve your mother's and sister's anxiety. You

shall see me during the evening, I promise you." And without waiting for an answer he jumped into the cab, which started off.

But it was not to the Rue St. Gilles that Maxence went. He was anxious first to see Mademoiselle Lucienne, to tell her the events of that day, the busiest of his existence; to tell her his discoveries, his surprises, his anxieties, and his hopes. To his astonishment he failed to find her at the Hôtel des Folies. She had gone out for a drive at three o'clock, M. Fortin told him, and had not yet returned; but she could not be much longer, as it was already getting dark. Maxence went out again to see if he could meet her. He had walked a little way along the Boulevard, when, at some distance off, on the Place du Château d'Eau, he thought he noticed an unusual commotion. Almost immediately he heard shouts of terror. Frightened people were running in all directions; and a carriage, going at full gallop, passed him like a flash. But quick as it passed, he had time to recognize Mademoiselle Lucienne clinging desperately to the seat. Wild with fear he started after it as fast as he could run. It was clear that the driver had no control over his horses. A policeman who tried to stop them was knocked down. Ten steps farther the hind-wheel of the carriage, catching the wheel of a heavy wagon, broke to splinters; and Mademoiselle Lucienne was thrown into the road, whilst the driver was precipitated to the pavement.

V.

THE Baron de Thaller was too practical a man to live in the same house, or even in the same district, where his offices were located. To dwell in the midst of his business; to be constantly subjected to the contact of his employees, to the unkindly comments of a crowd of subordinates; to expose himself to hourly annoyances, to sickening solicitations, to the reclamations and eternal complaints of his shareholders and his clients, would have been unbearable. He would have given up the business first. And so, the very day he established the Mutual Credit Bank in the Rue du Quatre-Septembre, he purchased a house in the Rue de la Pépinière, within a few steps of the Faubourg St. Honoré. It was a brand-new house, which had never been occupied, and which had just been erected by a contractor who was almost celebrated, towards 1866, at the time of the great transformations of Paris, when masses of houses were levelled to the ground, and rose again so rapidly, that one might well wonder whether the masons, instead of a trowel, did not make use of a magician's wand. This contractor, named Parcimieux, had come from the Limousin in 1860, with his mason's tools for all fortune, and, in less than six years had accumulated, at the lowest estimate, six millions of francs. Only he was a modest man, and took as much pains to conceal his fortune and offend no one, as most upstarts do to display their wealth, and insult the public. Though he could hardly sign his name, yet he knew and practised the maxim of the Greek philosopher, which is, perhaps, the true secret of happiness—hide thy life. And there were no expedients to which he did not resort to hide it. At the time of his greatest prosperity, for instance, having need of a carriage, he applied to the manager of the Cab Company, and had built for himself two cabs, outwardly similar in every respect to those used by the company, but within, most luxuriously upholstered, and drawn by horses of common appearance, but who could go their twenty-five miles in two hours any day.

And these he hired by the year. Having a carriage, the worthy builder determined also to have a house, his own house, built by himself. But this required infinitely greater precautions still. "For, as you may imagine," he explained to his friends, "a man does not make as much money as I have made without also making many bitter and irreconcilable enemies. I have against me all the builders who have not succeeded, all the sub-contractors I employ, and who say that I speculate on their poverty, and the thousands of workmen who work for me, and swear that I grind them down to the dust. Already they call me brigand, slaver, thief, leech. What would it be if they saw me living in a beautiful house of my own? They'd swear that I could not possibly have got so rich by honest means, and that I must have committed some crimes. Besides, to build me a handsome house on the street would be, in the case of a riot, to set up windows for the stones of all the rascals who have been in my employ." Such were M. Parcimieux' ideas, when, as he expressed it, he resolved to build for himself. A lot was for sale in the Rue de la Pépinière. He bought it, and at the same time purchased the adjoining house, which he immediately had pulled down. This operation placed in his possession a vast piece of ground, not very wide, but of great depth, stretching back, as it did, as far as the Rue de La Baume. Work was at once begun according to a plan which his architect and himself had spent six months in maturing. On the line of the street arose a house of the most modest appearance, two stories in height only, with a very high and very wide entrance for the passage of vehicles. Behind this house, between a spacious court and a vast garden, was built the residence which M. Parcimieux had already constructed in his dreams; and it really was an exceptional building both by the excellence of the materials used, and by the infinite care which presided over the minutest details. The marbles for the vestibule and the stairs were brought from Africa, Italy, and Corsica. He sent to Rome for workmen for the mosaics. The joiners and locksmiths were real artists. Repeating to every one that he was working for a great foreign lord, whose orders he went to take every morning, he was free to indulge his most extravagant fancies, without fearing jests or unpleasant remarks. Poor old man! The day when the last workman had driven in the last nail, an attack of apoplexy carried him off, without giving him time to say: "Oh!" Two days after, all his relatives from the Limonsin hurried into Paris like a pack of wolves. Six millions to divide; what a godsend! Litigation followed as a matter of course; and the house was offered for sale under a judgment. M. de Thaller bought it for two hundred and seventy-five thousand francs, about one-third what it had cost to build. A month later he had moved into it; and the expenses which he incurred to furnish his abode in a style worthy of itself was the talk of the town. And yet he was not fully satisfied with his purchase. Unlike M. Parcimieux, he had no wish whatever to conceal his wealth. What! he owned one of those exquisite little houses which excite at once the wonder and the envy of passers-by, and that house was hid behind such a common-looking building! "I must have that shanty pulled down," he said from time to time. And then he thought of something else; and the shanty was still standing on that evening, when, after leaving Maxence, M. de Trégars presented himself at M. de Thaller's.

The servants had, doubtless, received their instructions, for, as soon as Marius emerged from the porch of the front house, the concierge advanced from his lodge, bending low, and his mouth opened to his ears by the most obsequious of smiles. Without waiting for a question, he said: "The baron

has not yet returned. He cannot, however, be much longer away ; and the baroness is in. Please, then, give yourself the trouble to walk up to the house." And, standing aside, he struck upon the enormous gong that stood near his lodge a single sharp blow, intended to wake up the footmen on duty in the vestibule, and to announce a visitor of note. Slowly, but not without quietly observing everything, M. de Trégars crossed the court-yard, covered with fine sand—they would have powdered it with golden dust, if they had dared—and surrounded on all sides with bronze vases, in which beautiful rhododendrons were blossoming. It was nearly six o'clock. The manager of the Mutual Credit Bank dined at seven ; and the preparations for this important event were everywhere apparent. Through the large windows of the dining-room the steward could be seen presiding over the setting of the table. The butler was coming up from the cellar, loaded with bottles. Finally, through the apertures of the basement arose the appetizing perfumes of the kitchen. What an enormous business it required to support such a style, to display this luxury, which would shame one of those German princelings, who exchanged the crown of their ancestors for a Prussian livery gilded with French gold !—other people's money.

Meantime, the blow struck by the concierge on the gong had produced the desired effect ; and the doors of the vestibule seemed to open of their own accord before M. de Trégars as he ascended the steps. This vestibule, with the splendour of which Mademoiselle Lucienne had been so deeply impressed, would, indeed, have been worthy the attention of an artist, had it been allowed to retain the simple grandeur and the severe harmony which M. Parcimieux's, architect had imparted to it. But M. de Thaller, as he was proud of boasting, had a perfect horror of simplicity ; and, wherever he discovered a vacant space as big as his hand, he hung a picture, a bronze, or a piece of china, anything and anyhow. The two footmen were standing when M. de Trégars entered. "Please to follow me !" said the youngest without asking any questions. And, opening the broad glass doors at the other end of the hall, he preceded M. de Trégars, up a marble staircase, the elegant proportions of which were absolutely ruined by a ridiculous profusion of "objects of art" of all sorts, and from all sources. This staircase led to a vast semi-circular landing, upon which, between columns of precious marble, opened three wide doors. The footman opened the middle one, which led to M. de Thaller's picture-gallery, a celebrated one in the financial world, and which had acquired for him the reputation of an enlightened amateur. But M. de Trégars had no time to examine this gallery, which, moreover, he already knew well enough. The footman showed him into the small drawing-room of the baroness, a gem of a room, hung with crimson satin. "Will you be kind enough to take a seat," he said. "I will at once inform my mistress of your visit."

Left alone, M. de Trégars sat down. Worn out by the emotions of the day, and by an extraordinary contention of mind, he felt thankful for this slight respite, which permitted him, at the moment of a decisive step, to collect all his energy and all his presence of mind. And in a few minutes he was so deeply absorbed in his thoughts, that he started like a man suddenly aroused from sleep, at the sound of a door opening. At the same moment he heard a slight exclamation of surprise, "Ah !" Instead of the Baroness de Thaller, it was her daughter, Mademoiselle Césarine, who appeared. Stepping forward to the centre of the room, and acknowledging by a familiar nod M. de Trégars's most respectful bow, she said : "You should warn people of your presence. I came here to look for my mother

and it is you I find. Why, you have scared me to death." And taking hold of the young man's hand and pressing it to her side, "Feel," she added, "how my heart beats."

Younger than Mademoiselle Gilberte, Mademoiselle Césarine de Thaller had a reputation for beauty so thoroughly established, that to call it in question would have seemed a crime to her numerous admirers. And she really was a handsome young person. Rather tall and well made, she had broad hips, a waist as supple as a steel rod, and a magnificent throat. Her neck was perhaps a little too thick and too short, but over the nape was scattered in wild ringlets the rebellious hair that defied a comb. Her hair was blonde, or rather red, but of that red almost as dark as mahogany, which Titian admired, and which the handsome Venetian ladies obtained by means of rather repulsive practises, and by exposing themselves to the noonday sun on the terraces of their palaces. Her complexion had the gilded hues of amber. Her lips, red as blood, displayed when parted teeth of dazzling whiteness. In her large prominent eyes, of a milky blue, like the Northern skies, laughed the eternal irony of those that no longer have faith in anything. More anxious of her fame as a leader of fashion than of good taste, she wore a dress of doubtful shade, puffed up by means of an extravagant pannier, and buttoned obliquely across the chest, according to that ridiculous and ungraceful style invented by flat or humped women. Throwing herself into an easy chair, and placing cavalierly her right foot upon another, so as to display her leg, which was admirable, she remarked: "Do you know that it's perfectly astounding to see you here? Just imagine for a moment what a face the Baron 'Three Francs Sixty-eight' will make when he sees you!" It was her father whom she called thus, since the day when she discovered that there was a German coin called thaler, which represents three francs and sixty-eight centimes in French currency. "You know, I suppose," she went on, "that papa has just been taken in?"

M. de Trégars expressed his regrets in vague terms; but it was one of Mademoiselle Césarine's habits never to listen to the answers which were made to her questions. "Favoral," she continued, "papa's cashier, has just started on an international change of air. Did you know him?"

"Very little."

"He was an old chap with a face like an undertaker. And the Baron 'Three Francs Sixty-eight,' an old bird, was fool enough to be taken in by him! For he was taken in. He had a face like a man whose house is on fire when he came to tell us, mamma and myself, that Favoral had gone off with twelve millions."

"And has he really carried off that enormous sum?"

"Not entire, of course, because it was longer ago than yesterday that he began digging into the Mutual Credit Bank's pile. For years past this venerable old swell had been leading a somewhat variegated existence in company with rather funny ladies, you know. And as he was not precisely made to be adored at par, why, it cost papa's shareholders a pretty high premium. But, anyhow, he must have carried off a handsome nugget." And, bouncing to the piano, she sang to an accompaniment loud enough to crack the window-panes, one of the popular choruses of the day.

Any one but Marius de Trégars would have been doubtless strangely surprised at Mademoiselle de Thaller's behaviour. But he had known her for some time already; he was familiar with her past life, her habits, her tastes, and her pretensions. Until the age of fifteen,

Mademoiselle Césarine had remained shut up in one of those pleasant Parisian boarding-schools where young ladies are initiated into the great art of the toilette, and from which they emerge armed with the gayest theories, knowing how to see without seeming to look, and to lie boldly without blushing ; in a word, ripe for society. The directress of the boarding-school, a lady who had moved in society but who had met with reverses, and who was a good deal more of a dressmaker than a teacher said of Mademoiselle Césarine, who paid her three thousand five hundred francs a year : "She gives the greatest hopes for the future ; and I shall certainly make a superior woman of her." But the opportunity was not allowed her. The Baroness de Thaller discovered one morning that it was impossible for her to live without her daughter, and that her maternal heart was lacerated by a separation which was against the sacred laws of nature. She took her home, therefore, declaring that nothing, thenceforth, not even marriage should separate them, and that she would herself finish the dear child's education. From that moment, in fact, whoever saw the baroness would also see Mademoiselle Césarine, following in her wake. A girl of fifteen discreet and well trained is a convenient chaperon ; a chaperon who enables a woman to show herself boldly where she might not have dared to venture alone. In presence of a mother accompanied by her daughter, slander hesitates and dares not speak. Under the pretext that Césarine was still but a child, and of no consequence, Madame de Thaller dragged her everywhere, to the Bois and to the races, visiting and shopping, to balls and parties, to the watering-places and the seaside, to restaurants and to all the "first nights" at the Palais-Royal, the Bouffes, the Variétés, and the Délassements theatres. It was, therefore, especially at the theatre that the education of Mademoiselle de Thaller so happily commenced, had received the finishing touch. At sixteen she sang with surprising intonations and astonishing gestures Blanche d'Antigny's successful rondos, and Thérèse's most indecent verses. Between times she studied the fashion papers and formed her style in reading the "Vie Parisienne," the most enigmatic articles of which had no allusions sufficiently obscure to escape her penetration. She learned to ride on horseback, to fence and to shoot, and distinguished herself at pigeon-shooting matches. She kept a betting-book, played Trente et Quarante at Monaco ; and Baccarat had no secrets for her. At Trouville she astonished the natives with the startling scantiness of her bathing-costumes ; and when she found herself the centre of a reasonable circle of lookers-on, she plunged into the water with a pluck that drew upon her the applause of the bathing-men. She could smoke a cigarette, neatly toss off a glass of champagne ; and once her mother was obliged to bring her home and put her to bed, because she had insisted upon tasting some absinthe, and her conversation had become somewhat too eccentric.

Leading such a life it was difficult that public opinion should always spare Madame and Mademoiselle de Thaller. There were sceptics who insinuated that this steadfast friendship between mother and daughter had very much the appearance of the association of two women bound together by the complicity of a common secret. A broker told how one evening, or one night rather, for it was nearly two o'clock, happening to pass in front of the Moulin-Rouge he had seen the Baroness and Mademoiselle Césarine coming out accompanied by a gentleman, to him unknown, but who he was quite sure was not the Baron de Thaller. A certain journey which mother and daughter had undertaken in the depth of the winter, and which had lasted not less than two months, had been generally attributed to an imprudence,

the consequences of which it had become impossible to conceal. They had been to Italy they said when they returned; but no one had seen them there. Yet as Madame and Mademoiselle de Thaller's mode of life was, after all, the same as that of a great many women who passed for being perfectly proper; as there was no positive or palpable fact brought against them; as no name was mentioned; many people shrugged their shoulders and replied: "Pure slanders." And why not, since the Baron de Thaller the most interested party was perfectly satisfied? To the ill-advised friends who ventured some allusions to the public rumours, he replied according to his humour: "My daughter can play the mischief generally, if she sees fit. As I shall give her a dowry of a million, she will always find a husband." Or else: "And what of it? Do not American young ladies enjoy unlimited freedom? Are they not constantly seen going out with young gentlemen, or walking or travelling alone? Are they for all that less virtuous than our girls who are kept under such close watch? Do they make less faithful wives or less excellent mothers? Hypocrisy is not virtue." To a certain extent the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank was right. Already Mademoiselle de Thaller had had to decide upon several very suitable offers of marriage. She had flatly refused them all. "A husband!" she had answered each time. "Thank you, none for me. I have good enough teeth to eat up my dowry myself. Later on we'll see, when I've cut my wisdom teeth and am tired of my bachelor life." She did not seem near getting tired of it though she pretended that she had no more illusions, had exhausted every sensation and that life henceforth had no surprise in reserve for her. Her reception of M. de Trégars was, therefore, one of Mademoiselle Césarine's least eccentricities.

"I see with pleasure," said M. de Trégars when she had finished her song, "that the embezzlement of which your father has just been the victim does not in any way affect your good humour."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Would you have me cry," she asked "because the shareholders of the Baron 'Three Francs Sixty-eight' have been swindled? Console yourself, they are accustomed to it." And as M. de Trégars made no answer. "And in all that," she went on, "I see no one to pity except the wife and daughter of that old swell Favoral."

"They are, indeed, much to be pitied."

"They say that the mother is a good old woman."

"She is an excellent person."

"And the daughter? Costeclar was crazy about her once. He made eyes like a carp in love as he told us, mamma and myself, 'She is an angel, ladies, an angel! And when I have taken her in hand for a little time!'" Now tell me is she really as nice as all that?"

"She is very nice."

"Nicer than I am?"

"It is not at all the same thing, mademoiselle."

Though Mademoiselle de Thaller had stopped singing, she had not left the piano. Half turned towards M. de Trégars she ran her fingers listlessly over the keys, striking a note here and there, as if to punctuate her sentences. "Ah, how very pretty!" she exclaimed, "and above all, how gallant! Really, if you venture often on such declarations, mothers would be very wrong to trust you alone with their daughters."

"You did not understand me right mademoiselle."

"Perfectly right, on the contrary. I asked you if I was nicer than Mademoiselle Favoral; and you replied to me that it was not at all the same thing."

"It is because, mademoiselle, there is indeed no possible comparison between you, who are a wealthy heiress and whose life is a perpetual enchantment, and a poor girl, very humble and very modest, who rides in omnibuses, and who makes her dresses herself."

A contemptuous smile contracted Mademoiselle Césarine's lips. "Why not?" she interrupted. "Men have such funny tastes!"—And turning round suddenly, she began another rondo no less famous than the first.

M. de Trégars was observing her very attentively. He had not been the dupe of the great surprise she had manifested when she found him in the little drawing-room. "She knew I was here," he thought; "and it is her mother who has sent her to me. But why? and for what purpose?"

"With all that," she resumed, "I see the dear Madame Favoral and her modest daughter in a bit of a hole. What a mess, marquise!"

"They have plenty of courage, mademoiselle."

"Naturally. But what is better, the daughter has a splendid voice, at least, so her singing-master told Costeclar. Why should she not go on the stage? Actresses make lots of money you know. Papa will help her if she wishes. He has a great deal of influence in the theatres, papa has."

"Madame and Mademoiselle Favoral have friends."

"Ah, yes! Costeclar."

"Others besides."

"I beg your pardon; but it seems to me that he will do to begin with. He is gallant, Costeclar, extremely gallant, and, moreover, generous as a lord. Why should he not offer to that youthful and timid damsel a nice little position in mahogany and rosewood? That way, we should have the pleasure of meeting her in the Bois." And she began singing again.

"Ah, this big red-headed girl is terribly provoking!" thought M. de Trégars. But, as he did not as yet understand very clearly what she wished to come to, he kept on his guard, and remained cold as marble.

Already she had again turned towards him. "What a face you are making!" she said. "Are you jealous of the fiery Costeclar, by chance?"

"No, mademoiselle, no!"

"Then why don't you want him to succeed in his love? But he will, you'll see! Five hundred francs on Costeclar! Do you take it? No? I am sorry. It's twenty-five napoleons lost for me. I know very well that Mademoiselle—What's her name?"

"Gilberte."

"Ah! a nice name for a cashier's daughter! I am aware that she once sent that poor Costeclar and his offer to the devil. But she had resources then; whilst now—It's as stupid as it can be, but people must eat!"

"There are still women, mademoiselle, capable of starving to death." M. de Trégars now felt satisfied. It seemed evident to him that they had somehow got wind of his intentions; that Mademoiselle de Thaller had been sent to feel the ground; and that she only attacked Mademoiselle Gilberte in order to irritate him, and cause him, in a moment of anger, to declare himself.

"Bosh!" she said, "Mademoiselle Favoral is like all the others. If she had to choose between the amiable Costeclar and a stove full of charcoal, it is not the charcoal she would select."

At all times, Marius de Trégars disliked Mademoiselle Césarine to a supreme degree; and at this moment, had it not been for the pressing desire he had to see the Baron and Baroness de Thaller, he would have withdrawn. "Believe me, mademoiselle," he said coldly. "Spare a

poor girl stricken by a most cruel misfortune. Worse might happen to you."

"To me! And what the mischief do you suppose can happen to me?"

"Who knows?"

She started to her feet so violently that she upset the music-stool. "Whatever it may be," she exclaimed, "I say in advance, I am glad!" And as M. de Trégars looked at her with some surprise, "Yes, I am glad!" she repeated, "because it would be a change; and I am sick of the life I lead. Yes, sick to be eternally and invariably happy of that same dreary happiness. And to think that there are idiots who believe that I amuse myself, and who envy my fate! To think that when I ride through the streets I hear girls exclaim, whilst looking at me 'Isn't she lucky?' Little fools! I'd like to see them in my place. They live, they do. Their pleasures are not all alike. They have anxieties and hopes, ups and downs, hours of rain and hours of sunshine; whilst I—always a dead calm! the barometer always at 'Set fair.' What a bore! Do you know what I did to-day? Exactly the same as yesterday; and to-morrow I'll do the same as to-day. A good dinner is a good thing; but always the same dinner, without extras or additions—it is horrible! Too many truffles. Give me a saveloy. I know the bill of fare by heart, you see. In winter, theatres and balls; in summer, races and the seaside; summer and winter shopping, rides to the Bois, visits, trying on dresses, perpetual adoration by my mother's friends, all of them brilliant and gallant fellows to whom the mere thought of my dowry gives the jaundice. Excuse my yawning; I am thinking of their conversation. And such will be my existence until I make up my mind to take a husband! For I'll have to come to it too. The Baron 'Three Francs Sixty-eight' will present to me some swell or other attracted by my money. I shall answer, 'I'd just as soon have him as anybody else;' and he will be admitted to the honour of paying his addresses to me. Every morning he will send me a splendid bouquet; every evening, after the Bourse, he'll come bedecked in evening dress and fresh kid gloves. During the afternoon he and papa will pull each other's hair out on the subject of the dowry. At last the happy day will arrive. Can't you see it from here? Mass with music, dinner, ball. The Baron 'Three Francs Sixty-eight' will not spare me a single ceremony. The marriage of the daughter of the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank must necessarily be an advertisement. The papers will publish the names of the bridesmaids and of the guests. To be sure, papa will have a face a yard long, because he will have been compelled to pay the dowry the day before. Mamma will be all upset at the idea of becoming a grandmother. The bridegroom will be in a wretched humour, because his boots will be too tight; and I'll look like a goose, because I'll be dressed in white; and white is a stupid colour, which is not at all becoming to me. Charming family gathering! Two weeks later my husband will be sick of me, and I'll be disgusted with him. At the end of a month we'll be at daggers drawn. He'll go back to his club and his mistresses; and I—I shall have gained the right to go out alone; and I'll begin again going to the Bois, to balls, to races, wherever my mother goes. I'll spend an enormous amount of money on my dresses, and I'll make debts which papa will pay." Though anything might be expected of Mademoiselle Césarine, still M. de Trégars seemed visibly astonished. And she, laughing at his surprise, went on: "That's the invariable programme, and that's why I say I'm glad at the idea of a change, whatever it may be. You blame me for not

pitifully Mademoiselle Gilberte. How could I, since I envy her? She is happy because her future is not settled, laid out, fixed in advance. She is poor; but she is free. She is only twenty; she is pretty; she has an admirable voice; she can go on the stage to-morrow, and become in less than six months one of the pet actresses of Paris. What a life then! Ah, that is the one I dream, the one I would have selected, had I been mistress of my destiny."

But Mademoiselle Césarine was interrupted by the noise of the opening door, and the Baroness de Thaller appeared. As she was going to the opera immediately after dinner, she was in full dress. She wore a costume, cut audaciously low in the neck, of very light grey satin, trimmed with bands of cherry-coloured silk edged with lace. In her hair, worn high on the top of her head, was a bunch of fuchsias, the long trailing shoots of which, fastened together by a large diamond brooch, hung over her shoulders, white and smooth as marble. But though she forced herself to smile, her countenance was not that of festive days; and the glance which she cast upon her daughter and Marius de Trégars was full of threats. In a voice of which she tried in vain to control the emotion, she said to Marius: "How very kind of you, marquis, to respond so soon to my invitation of this morning! I am really distressed to have kept you waiting; but I was dressing. After what has happened to M. de Thaller it is absolutely indispensable that I should go out and show myself; otherwise our enemies will be telling every one to-morrow that I am in Belgium, preparing lodgings for my husband." And then, suddenly changing her tone, she asked: "But what was that madcap Césarine telling you?"

It was with a profound surprise that M. de Trégars discovered that the good understanding which he suspected between the mother and daughter did not exist, at least at that moment. Veiling under a jesting tone the strange conjectures which the unexpected discovery aroused within him, he replied: "Mademoiselle Césarine, who is much to be pitied, was telling me all her troubles."

But the young girl interrupted him. "Do not take the trouble to tell an untruth, marquis," she said. "Mamma knows what I was saying as well as you; for she was listening at the door."

"Césarine!" exclaimed Madame de Thaller.

"And the reason she came in so suddenly is because she thought it was fully time to cut short my confidences."

The face of the baroness became crimson. "The child is going mad!" she said.

The child burst out laughing. "That's my way," she went on. "You should not have sent me here by chance, and against my wish. You made me do it; don't complain. You were sure that I had but to appear, and M. de Trégars, madly in love with me, would fall at my feet. I appeared, and—you saw the effect through the keyhole, didn't you?"

"Such behaviour is unheard of," said Madame de Thaller, as with contracted features and flashing eyes, she twisted her lace handkerchief between her fingers covered with rings. "She has certainly lost her senses."

Dropping her mother an ironical curtesy, the young lady continued: "Thanks for the compliment! Unfortunately, I never was more completely in possession of all the good sense I can boast of than I am now, dear mamma. What were you telling me a moment since? 'Run, the Marquis de Trégars has come to ask your hand: it's all settled.' And what did I answer? 'No need to trouble myself. If, instead of one

million, papa were to give me two, four millions, indeed all the milliards paid by France to Prussia, M. de Trégars would not have me for a wife." And looking Marius straight in the face, she asked: "Am I not right, marquis? And isn't it a fact that you wouldn't have me at any price? Come, now, your hand upon your heart, answer."

M. de Trégars's position was somewhat embarrassing between these two women, whose anger was equal, though it manifested itself in a different way. Evidently it was a discussion begun before, which was now being continued in his presence. "I think, mademoiselle," he replied, "that you have been slandering yourself gratuitously."

"Oh, no! not at all," she interrupted; "and if mamma had not happened to come in, you would have heard much more. But you have not answered my question." And as M. de Trégars said nothing, she turned towards the baroness: "Ah, ah! you see," she said. "Who was crazy, you or I? Ah! every one here imagines that money is everything, that everything is for sale, and that everything can be bought. Well, no! There are still some men, who, for all the gold in the world, would not give their name to Césarine de Thaller. It is strange; but it is so, dear mamma, and we must make the best of it." Then turning towards Marius, and emphasizing each syllable, as though afraid that the allusion might escape him, she added: "The men of whom I speak marry girls who would know how to starve to death."

Knowing her daughter well enough to be aware that she could not impose silence upon her, the Baroness de Thaller dropped into an arm-chair. She was trying hard to appear indifferent to what her daughter was saying; but at every moment a threatening gesture, or a hoarse exclamation, betrayed the storm that raged within her. "Go on, poor foolish child!" said she, "go on!"

And she did go on. "Finally, were M. de Trégars willing to have me, I would refuse him, because, then—" A fugitive blush appeared upon her cheeks, her bold eyes vacillated, and, dropping her voice, she added: "Because, then, he would no longer be what he is; because I feel that fatally I shall despise the husband whom papa will buy me. And if I came here to expose myself to an affront which I foresaw, it was because I wanted to make sure of a fact of which a word of Costeclar, a few days ago, had given me an idea of a fact which you do not perhaps suspect, dear mother, despite your astonishing perspicacity. I wanted to find out M. de Trégars's secret; and I have found it out."

M. de Trégars had come to the De Thaller mansion with a plan well settled in advance. He had pondered long before deciding what he would do, and what he would say, and how he would begin the decisive struggle. What had taken place showed him the idleness of his conjectures, and, as a natural consequence, upset his plans. To abandon himself to the chances of the hour, and to make the best possible use of them, was now the wisest thing to do. "Give me the credit, mademoiselle," he exclaimed, "for sufficient penetration to have perfectly well discerned your intentions. There was no need of artifice, because I have nothing to conceal. You had but to question me, I would have answered you frankly, 'Yes, it is true I love Mademoiselle Gilberte, and before a month has passed she will be Marchioness de Trégars.'"

Madame de Thaller, at these words, started to her feet, pushing back her arm-chair so violently that it rolled as far as the wall. "What!" she exclaimed, "you will marry Gilberte Favoral—you!"

"Yes, I!"

"The daughter of a defaulting cashier, of a dishonoured man whom justice pursues, and the galleys await!"

"Yes!" And in a voice that caused a shiver to run over Madame de Thaller's white shoulders, M. de Trégars added: "Whatever may have been Vincent Favoral's crime; whether he has or has not stolen the twelve millions which are missing from the Mutual Credit Bank; whether he is alone guilty, or has accomplices; whether he be a knave or a fool, an impostor or a dupe, Mademoiselle Gilberte is not responsible."

"You know the Favoral family, then?"

"Enough to make their cause henceforth my own."

The baroness's agitation was so great, that she did not even attempt to conceal it. "A nobody's daughter!" she said.

"I love her."

"Without a sou!"

"Why, that's the very reason why a man can marry her!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Césarine. And holding out her hand to M. de Trégars, she added: "What you are about to do is well, very well."

There was a wild look in the baroness's eyes. "Mad, unhappy child!" she cried. "If your father should hear of this!"

"Who would report our conversation to him? M. de Trégars? He would not do such a thing. You? You dare not!"

Drawing herself up to her fullest height, her breast swelling with anger, her head thrown back, her eyes flashing, Madame de Thaller said, extending her arm towards the door: "Césarine, leave the room, I command you."

But, motionless on her chair, the young girl cast upon her mother a look of defiance. "Come, calm yourself," she observed in a tone of crushing irony, "or you'll spoil your complexion for the rest of the evening. Do I complain? do I get excited? And yet whose fault is it, if honour makes it a duty for me to cry 'Beware!' to an honest man who wishes to marry me? That Gilberte should get married, that she should be very happy, have many children, darn her husband's socks, and cook her own dinner, that is her part in life. Ours, dear mother, that which you have taught me, is to laugh and enjoy ourselves, always, night and day, till death."

The entrance of a footman interrupted her. Handing a card to Madame de Thaller, he said: "The gentleman who gave it to me is in the drawing-room."

The baroness turned very pale. "Oh!" she murmured, turning the card between her fingers, "oh!" Then she suddenly left the room exclaiming, "I shall be back directly."

An embarrassing, painful silence followed the Baroness de Thaller's precipitate departure. Mademoiselle Césarine had approached the mantelpiece. All palpitating and excited, she was leaning her elbow upon it, and her face was hidden in her hand. Intimidated for perhaps the first time in her life, she had turned away her great blue eyes, as if afraid that they should betray a shadow of her thoughts. M. de Trégars remained in his place, not having one whit too much of that power of self-control, which is acquired by a long experience of the world, to conceal his impressions. If he had a fault, it was certainly not self-conceit; but Mademoiselle de Thaller had been too explicit and too clear to leave him a doubt. All she had said could be summed up in one sentence: "My parents were in hopes that I would become your wife; I had judged you well enough to under-

stand their error. Precisely because I love you, I acknowledge myself unworthy of you, and I wish you to know that if you had asked my hand, the hand of a girl who has a dowry of a million, I would have ceased to esteem you." That such a feeling should have budded and blossomed in Mademoiselle Césarine's mind, withered as it was by vanity, and cloyed by pleasure, was almost a miracle. It was, at any rate, an astonishing proof of love which she gave; and Marius de Trégars would not have been a man if he had not been deeply moved by it.

"What a miserable being I am!" she suddenly exclaimed.

"You mean unhappy," said M. de Trégars gently.

"What can you think of my sincerity? You must doubtless find it strange, impudent, grotesque." He lifted his hand in protest; for she gave him no time to put in a word. "And yet," she continued, "this is not the first time that I am assailed by sinister ideas, and that I feel ashamed of myself. I was convinced once that this mad existence of mine is the only enviable one, the only one that can give happiness. And now I discover that it is not the right path which I have taken, or, rather, which I have been made to take. And there is no possibility of retracing my steps." She turned pale, and, in an accent of gloomy despair, she resumed: "Everything fails me. It seems as though I were rolling into a bottomless abyss, without a branch or a tuft of grass to cling to. Around me, emptiness, night, chaos. I am not yet twenty; and it seems to me that I have lived thousands of years and exhausted every sensation. I have seen everything, learned everything, experienced everything, and I am tired of everything, nauseously satiated. You see me looking like a brainless foolish girl. I sing, I jest, I talk slang. My gaiety surprises everybody. In reality I am literally bored to death. What I feel I could not express, there are no words to render absolute disgust. Sometimes I say to myself, 'It is stupid to be so sad. What do you need? Are you not young, handsome, rich?' But I must need something, or else I would not be thus agitated, nervous, anxious, unable to stay in one place, tormented by confused aspirations and by desires which I cannot state. What can I do? Seek oblivion in pleasure and dissipation? I try, and I succeed for an hour or so; but the re-action comes and the effect vanishes, like froth from champagne. The lassitude returns; and whilst outwardly I continue to laugh, I shed within tears of blood which scald my heart. What is to become of me, without a memory in the past, or a hope in the future upon which to rest my thoughts?" And bursting into tears, she exclaimed: "Oh, I am wretchedly unhappy! I wish I was dead."

M. de Trégars rose feeling more deeply moved than he would, perhaps, have liked to acknowledge. "I was laughing at you only a moment since," he said in a grave and vibrating voice. "Pardon me, mademoiselle. It is with the utmost sincerity, and from the innermost depths of my soul that I pity you."

She was looking at me with an air of timid doubt, big tears trembling between her long eyelashes. "Truly?" she asked.

"Upon my honour."

"And you will not go away with too bad an opinion of me?"

"I shall retain the firm belief, that when you were yet but a child, you were mislead by insane theories."

Gently and sadly she passed her hand over her forehead. "Yes that's it," she murmured. "How could I resist examples coming from certain persons? How could I help becoming intoxicated when I saw myself, as it

were in a cloud of incense, when I heard nothing but praises and applause ? And then there is the money, which depraves when it is obtained in a certain way."

She ceased speaking ; but the silence was soon again broken by a slight noise, which came from the adjoining room. Mechanically M. de Trégars looked around him. The little drawing-room in which he found himself was divided from the principal drawing-room of the house by a high and broad door which had been left partly open. Now such was the disposition of the mirrors in the two rooms, that M. de Trégars could see reflected in the mirror over the mantelpiece of the little drawing-room, almost the whole of the interior of the principal one. A man of suspicious appearance, and dressed in very shabby clothes, was standing waiting in it. And the more M. de Trégars examined him, the more it seemed to him that he had already seen somewhere that uneasy countenance, that cunning glance, that wicked smile fitting upon flat, thin lips. But suddenly the man bowed very low, and Madame de Thaller almost immediately appeared within the range of the looking-glass. She seemed greatly agitated ; and with a finger upon her lips, she enjoined the man to be prudent, and to speak low. It was therefore in a whisper, and such a low whisper that not even a vague murmur reached the little drawing-room, that the man uttered a few words. They were such that the baroness started back as if she had seen a precipice yawning at her feet ; and by this action it was easy to understand that she must have said : "Is it possible ?" With the voice which still could not be heard, but with a gesture which could be seen, the man evidently answered : "It is so, I assure you !" And leaning towards Madame de Thaller, who seemed in no wise shocked to feel this repulsive personage's lips almost touching her ear, he continued speaking to her. The surprise which this scene caused to M. de Trégars was great, but it did not prevent him wondering what could be the meaning of it. How came this suspicious-looking man to have obtained access without difficulty into the principal drawing-room ? Why had the baroness, on receiving his card, turned whiter than the lace on her dress ? What was the news he brought which made such a deep impression ? What was he saying that seemed at once to terrify and to delight Madame de Thaller ? But soon she interrupted the man, motioned him to wait, and disappeared for a minute ; and when she returned she held in her hand a bundle of bank-notes, which she counted out upon the table. She counted twenty-five, which, so far as M. de Trégars could judge, were hundred-franc-notes. The man took them, recounted them, slipped them into his pocket with a grin of satisfaction, and then seemed disposed to retire. The baroness detained him, however ; and it was she now, who leaning towards him, commenced to explain, or rather as far as her attitude showed to ask something. It must have been a serious matter, for he shook his head, and moved his arms as if he said : "The deuce, the deuce !" The strangest suspicions flashed across M. de Trégars's mind. What was the bargain to which the mirror thus made him an accidental witness ? For it was a bargain, there could be no mistake about that. The man having undertaken a commission, had fulfilled it, and had come to receive the price agreed upon. And now another commission was proposed to him.

But M. de Trégars's attention was suddenly diverted by Mademoiselle Césarine. Shaking off the torpor which for a moment had overpowered her, she resumed, answering rather the objections of her own mind than addressing herself to M. de Trégars : "But why fret and worry ? Things are just as they are, and I cannot undo them. Ah ! if the mistakes of life were

like soiled clothes, which are allowed to accumulate, and which are all sent out at once to the wash. But nothing washes the past, not even repentance, whatever is said. There are some ideas which should be repelled. A prisoner should not allow himself to think of freedom. And yet," she added, shrugging her shoulders, "a prisoner has always the hope of escaping; whereas I have none. But that's enough sentiment for one day, and instead of staying here boring you to death, I ought to go and dress; for I am going to the opera with my sweet mamma, and afterwards to a ball. You ought to come. I am going to wear a stunning dress. The ball is at Madame de Bois d'Ardon's, one of our friends, a progressive woman. She has a smoking-room for ladies. What do you think of that? Come will you join us? We'll drink champagne and we'll laugh. No? Take care of yourself then, and give my compliments to your family."

But at the moment of leaving the room, her heart failed her. "This is doubtless the last time I shall ever see you M. de Trégars," she said. "Farewell! You know now why I, who have a dowry of a million, I envy Gilberte Favoral. Once more farewell. And whatever happiness may fall to your lot in life, remember that Césarine has wished it all to you." And she went out at the very moment that the Baroness de Thaller returned.

VI.

"CÉSARINE!" Madame de Thaller called in a voice which sounded at once like a prayer and a threat.

"I am going to dress myself, mamma," she answered.

"Come back!"

"So that you can scold me if I am not ready when you want to go? Thank you, no."

"I command you to come back, Césarine."

No answer. She was already far away.

"What an extraordinary girl!" said Madame de Thaller taking a seat near M. de Trégars.

Meantime, Marius was watching in the glass what was going on in the other room. The suspicious-looking man was still there, and alone. A servant had brought him pen, ink, and paper; and he was writing rapidly. "How is it that they leave him there alone?" wondered Marius. And he endeavoured to discover on the baroness's features an answer to the confused presentiments which agitated his brain. But there was no longer any trace of the emotion which she had manifested when taken unawares. Having had time for reflection, her countenance had resumed its ordinary expression.

"I was saying," repeated Madame de Thaller, somewhat surprised at M. de Trégars's silence, "that Césarine is a strange girl."

"Strange, indeed!" he answered still absorbed by what was taking place in the principal drawing-room.

"And such is," said the baroness with a sigh, "the result of M. de Thaller's weakness, and above all of my own."

"Ah!"

"We have only Césarine; and it is natural that we should spoil her. Her fancy has always been, and is still, our only law. She has never had time to express a wish; she is obeyed before she has spoken." She sighed again, and deeper than the first time. "You have just seen," she resumed, "the results of that insane way of bringing her up. And yet it does not

do to trust appearances. Césarine, believe me, is not as strange as she seems. She possesses solid qualities, those which a man expects of the woman who is to be his wife."

"I believe you, madame," said M. de Trégars, without taking his eyes off the looking-glass.

"With her father, with me especially, she is capricious, wilful, and violent; but in the hands of the husband of her choice she would be like wax in the hands of the modeller."

The man in the other room had finished his letter, and, with an equivocal smile was reading it over. "Believe me, madame," replied M. de Trégars, "I perfectly understood how much innocent boasting there was in all that Mademoiselle Césarine told me."

"Then, really, you do not think her very bad."

"Your heart has not more indulgence for her than my own."

"And yet it is from you that her first real sorrow comes."

"From me?"

The baroness shook her head in a melancholy way, to convey an idea of her maternal affection and anxiety. "Yes, from you, my dear marquis," she replied, "from you alone. On the very day you entered this house, Césarine's whole nature changed."

Having read his letter over, the man folded it, and slipped it into his pocket, and leaving his seat, seemed to be waiting for something. M. de Trégars was following in the glass his every motion, with the most eager curiosity. And nevertheless, as he felt the absolute necessity of saying something, were it only to avoid attracting the baroness's attention, he observed: "What! Mademoiselle Césarine's nature changed so suddenly?"

"In one night. Had she not met the hero of whom every girl dreams? A man of thirty, bearing one of the oldest names in France." She stopped, expecting an answer, a word, an exclamation. But as M. de Trégars said nothing, she asked: "Did you never notice anything, then?"

"Nothing."

"And suppose I were to tell you myself, that my poor Césarine, alas! loves you?"

M. de Trégars started. Had he been less occupied with the personage in the other room, he would certainly not have allowed the conversation to drift into this channel. He understood his mistake; and in an icy tone replied: "Permit me, madame, to believe that you are jesting."

"And suppose it were the truth?"

"It would make me unhappy in the extreme."

"Sir!"

"For the reason which I have already told you, that I love Mademoiselle Gilberte Favoral with the deepest and the purest love, and that for the past three years she has been, before God, my affianced bride."

Angry glances appeared in Madame de Thaller's eyes. "And I," she exclaimed, "I tell you that such a marriage is absurd."

"I wish it were still more so, that I might the better show to Gilberte how dear she is to me."

Calm in appearance, the baroness was scratching with her nails the satin of the chair on which she was seated. "Then," she resumed, "your resolution is settled?"

"Irrevocably."

"But come now, between ourselves who are no longer children, suppose M. de Thaller were to double Césarine's dowry, to treble it?"

An expression of intense disgust contracted the young man's manly features. "Ah ! not another word, madame," he interrupted.

There was no hope left. Madame de Thaller fully realized it by the tone in which he spoke. She remained pensive for over a minute, and suddenly, like a person who has finally made up her mind, she rang the bell. A footman appeared. "Do what I told you !" she ordered. And as soon as the footman had gone, turning to M. de Trégars, she said: "Alas ! who would have thought that I should curse the day when you first entered our house ?"

But whilst she spoke M. de Trégars noticed in the looking-glass the result of the order she had just given. The footman walked into the principal drawing-room, spoke a few words, and the man with the alarming countenance at once put on his dirty hat and went out. "All this is very strange !" thought M. de Trégars.

Meantime the baroness continued : "If your intentions are to that point irrevocable, how is it that you are here ? You have too much experience of the world not to have understood, this morning, the object of my visit and of my allusions."

Fortunately, M. de Trégars's attention was no longer distracted by the proceedings in the next room. The decisive moment had come ; the success of the game he was playing would, perhaps, depend upon his coolness and self-command. "It is because I did understand, madame, and even better than you suppose, that I am here."

"Indeed !"

"I came intending to deal with M. de Thaller alone. I have been compelled, by what has happened, to alter my intentions. It is to you that I will speak first."

Madame de Thaller continued to manifest the same tranquil assurance ; but she no longer reclined in her seat. Feeling the approach of the storm, she wished to be ready to meet it. "You honour me greatly," she said with an ironical smile.

There was, henceforth, no human power capable of turning Marius de Trégars from the object he had in view. "It is to you I will speak," he repeated, "because after you have heard me you may perhaps judge that it is your interest to join me in endeavouring to obtain from your husband what I ask, what I demand, what I must have."

The baroness looked at him with an air of surprise marvellously well simulated, if it was not real.

"My father," he proceeded to say, "the Marquis de Trégars, was once very rich : he possessed several millions. And yet when I had the misfortune to lose him, three years ago, he was so thoroughly ruined, that to relieve the scruples of his honour, and to make his death easier, I gave up to his creditors all I had in the world. What had become of my father's fortune ? What philter had been administered to him to induce him to launch into hazardous speculations, he, an old Breton nobleman, full, even to absurdity, of the most obstinate prejudices of the nobility ? That is what I wished to ascertain."

"Ah "

"And now, madame, I have ascertained."

She was a strong-minded woman, the Baroness de Thaller. She had had so many adventures in her life, she had walked on the edges of so many precipices, concealed so many anxieties, that danger was, as it were, her element, and that at the decisive moment of an almost desperate game,

she could continue smiling, like those hardened gamblers whose faces never betray their terrible emotion at the moment when they risk their last stake. Not a muscle of her face moved ; and it was with the most imperturbable calm that she said : "Continue, I am listening ; it must be quite interesting."

That was not the way to propitiate M. de Trégars. He resumed, in a brief and harsh tone : "When my father died I was young. I did not know then what I have learned since, that to help to insure the impunity of knaves is almost to make one's self their accomplice. And the victim who says nothing, and submits, does help to insure it. The honest man, on the contrary, should speak, and point out to others the trap into which he has fallen, that they may avoid it."

The baroness was listening with the air of a person who is compelled by politeness to hear a tiresome story. "That is a rather gloomy preamble," she observed.

M. de Trégars took no notice of the interruption. "At all times," he continued, "my father seemed careless of his affairs ; that affectation, he thought, was due to the name he bore. But his negligence was only apparent. I might mention things of him that would do honour to the most methodical tradesman. He had, for instance, the habit of preserving all the letters of any importance which he received. He left behind him twelve or fifteen boxes full of them. They were carefully classified ; and many bore upon their margins a few notes indicating what answer had been made to them."

"That is indeed order," said the baroness, half suppressing a yawn, "if I know anything about it."

"At the first moment, determined not to stir up the past, I attached no importance to those letters ; and they would certainly have been burnt, but for an old friend of the family, the Count de Villegré, who had them carried to his own house. But later, acting under the influence of circumstances which it would be too long to explain to you, I regretted my apathy ; and I thought that I should perhaps find in that correspondence something to either dissipate or justify certain suspicions which had occurred to me."

"So that, like a respectful son, you read it?"

M. de Trégars bowed ceremoniously. "I believe," he said, "that to avenge a father of the imposture of which he was the victim during his life, is to render homage to his memory. Yes, madame, I read the whole of that correspondence, and with an interest which you will soon understand. I had already, and without result, examined the contents of several boxes, when in the bundle marked 1852, a year which my father spent in Paris, certain letters attracted my attention. They were written upon coarse paper, in a very primitive hand-writing, and wretchedly badly spelt. They were signed sometimes Phrasie, sometimes Marchioness de Javelle. Some gave the address, 'Rue des Bergers, No. 3, Paris-Grenelle.' Those letters left me no doubt upon what had taken place. My father had met a young work-girl of rare beauty ; he had taken a fancy to her ; and, as he was tormented by the fear of being loved for his money alone, he had passed himself off as a poor clerk in one of the ministries."

"Quite a touching little love romance," remarked the baroness.

But there was no impertinence that could affect Marius de Trégars's coolness. "A romance, perhaps," he said, "but in that case a money-romance, not a love-romance. This Phrasie, or Marchioness de Javelle announces in one of her letters, that in February, 1853, she has given birth to a

daughter, whom she has confided to some relatives of hers in the south, near Toulouse. It was doubtless that event which induced my father to acknowledge who he was. He confesses that he is not a poor clerk, but the Marquis de Trégars, having an income of over a hundred thousand francs. At once the tone of the correspondence changes. The Marchioness de Javelle is very dull where she lives; the neighbours reproach her with her fault; work spoils her pretty hands. Result: less than two weeks after the birth of her daughter, my father hires for his pretty mistress a lovely house in the Rue de Bourgogne, which she occupies under the name of Madame Deville; she is allowed fifteen hundred francs a month, servants, horses, and a carriage."

Madame de Thaller was giving signs of the utmost impatience. Without paying any attention to them, M. de Trégars proceeded: "Henceforth, free to see each other daily, my father and his mistress cease to write. But Madame Deville does not waste her time. During a space of less than eight months, from February to September, she induces my father to dispose—not in her favour, she is too disinterested for that, but in favour of her daughter—of a sum exceeding five hundred thousand francs. In September, the correspondence is resumed. Madame Deville discovers that she is not happy, and acknowledges it in a letter, which shows, by its improved writing and more correct spelling, that she has been taking lessons. She complains of her precarious situation; the future frightens her; she longs for respectability. Such is, for three months, the constant burden of her correspondence. She regrets the time when she was a work-girl; why has she been so weak? Then, at last, in a note which betrays long debates and stormy discussions, she announces that she has an unexpected offer of marriage; a fine fellow, who, if she only had two hundred thousand francs, would give his name to herself and to her darling little daughter. For a long time my father hesitates, he loves his pretty mistress so much; but she presses her point with such rare skill, she demonstrates so conclusively that this marriage will insure the happiness of their child, that my father yields at last, and resigns himself to the sacrifice. And in a memorandum on the margin of a last letter, he states that he has just given two hundred thousand francs to Madame Deville; that he will never see her again; and that he returns to live in Brittany, where he wishes, by the most rigid economy, to repair the breach he has just made in his fortune."

"Thus end all these love-stories," said Madame de Thaller in a jesting tone.

"I beg your pardon, this one is not ended yet. For many years my father kept his word, and never left our home at Trégars. But at last he grew tired of his solitude, and returned to Paris. Did he seek to see his former mistress again? I think not. I rather imagine that chance brought them together; or else, that, being aware of his return, she managed to put herself in his way. He found her more fascinating than ever, and, according to what she wrote him, rich and respected; for her husband had become a person of note. She would have been perfectly happy, she added, had it been possible for her to forget the man whom she had once loved so much, and to whom she owed her position. I have that letter. The elegant handwriting, the style, and the correct orthography, express better than anything else the transformations of the Marchioness de Javelle: only it is not signed. The little work-girl has become prudent; she has much to lose, and fears to compromise herself. A week later, in a laconic note, apparently dictated by an irresistible passion, she begs my father to

come to see her at her own house. He does so, and finds there a little girl, whom he believes to be his own child, and whom he at once idolizes. And all is over. Again he falls under the charm. Hé ceases to belong to himself; his former mistress can dispose, at her pleasure, of his fortune and of his fate. But see now what bad luck! The husband takes it into his head to become jealous of my father's visits. In a letter, which is a masterpiece of diplomacy, the lady explains her anxiety. 'He has suspicions,' she writes; 'and to what extremities might he not resort were he to discover the truth!' And with infinite art she insinuates that the best way to justify his constant presence is to associate himself with that jealous husband. It is with childish haste that my father jumps at the suggestion. But money is needed. He sells his lands, and everywhere announces that he has great financial ideas, and that he is going to increase his fortune tenfold. Soon he is the partner of his former mistress's husband; engaged in speculations; director of a company. He thinks that he is doing an excellent business; he is convinced that he is making lots of money. Poor honest man! They prove to him, one morning, that he is ruined, and, what is more, compromised. And this is made to look so much like the truth, that I interfere myself and pay the creditors. We were ruined; but honour was safe. A few weeks later my father died broken-hearted."

Madame de Thaller half rose from her chair with a gesture which indicated the joy of escaping at last from a merciless bore. A glance from M. de Trégars riveted her to her seat, freezing upon her lips the jest she was about to utter.

"I have not done yet," he said roughly.

And, without suffering any interruption, he resumed: "From this correspondence resulted the flagrant, irrefutable proof of a shameful intrigue, long since suspected by my old friend, General Count de Villegré. It became evident to me that my poor father had been most shamefully imposed upon by that mistress so handsome and so dearly loved; and, later, despoiled by her husband. But all this availed me nothing. Being ignorant of my father's life and connections, the letters giving neither a name nor a precise detail, I knew not whom to accuse. Besides, in order to accuse, it is necessary to have, at least, some material proof."

The baroness had resumed her seat; and everything about her—her attitude, her gestures, the motion of her lips—seemed to say: "You are my guest. Civility has its demands; but really you abuse your privileges."

M. de Trégars continued: "At that moment I was still a sort of savage, wholly absorbed in my experiments, and scarcely ever setting foot outside my laboratory. I was indignant; I ardently wished to find and to punish the villains who had robbed us; but I knew not how to go about it, nor in what direction to seek information. The wretches would, perhaps, have gone unpunished, but for a good and worthy man, now a commissary of police, to whom I once rendered a slight service, one night, in a riot, when he was close-pressed by some half-dozen rascals. I explained the situation to him; he took much interest in it, promised his assistance, and marked out my line of conduct."

Madame de Thaller moved restlessly upon her chair. "I must confess," she began, "that I am not wholly mistress of my time. I am dressed, as you see, and I have to go out."

If she had preserved any hope of adjourning the explanation which she felt coming, she must have lost it when she heard the tone in which M. de Trégars interrupted her. "You can go out to-morrow." And, without

hurrying, he resumed: "Advised, as I have just told you, and assisted by the experience of a professional man, I went first to No. 3 Rue des Bergers, in Grenelle. I found there some old people, the foreman of a neighbouring factory and his wife, who had been living in the house for nearly twenty-five years. At my first question, they exchanged a glance, and commenced laughing. They remembered perfectly the Marchioness de Javelle, which was but a nickname for a young and pretty laundress, whose real name was Euphrasie Taponnet. She had lived for eighteen months on the same landing as themselves; she had a lover, who passed himself off for a clerk, but who was, in fact, she had told them, a very wealthy nobleman. They added that she had given birth to a little girl, and that, two weeks later, she disappeared, and they never heard of her again. When I left them, they said to me, 'If you see Phrasie, ask her if she recollects old Chandour and his wife. She is sure to remember us.'"

For the first time, Madame de Thaller shuddered slightly, but almost imperceptibly.

"From Grenelle," continued M. de Trégars, "I went to the house in the Rue de Bourgogne where my father's mistress had lived under the name of Madame Deville. I was in luck. I found there the same concierge as in 1853. As soon as I mentioned Madame Deville she answered me that she had not in the least forgotten her, but on the contrary, would know her among a thousand. She was, she said, one of the prettiest little women she had ever seen, and the most generous tenant. I understood the hint, handed her a couple of napoleons, and learnt from her everything she knew on the subject. It seemed that this pretty Madame Deville had not one lover, but two—the acknowledged one, who was the master, and who footed the bills; and the other, an anonymous one, who went out by the back-stairs, and who did not pay on the contrary. The first was the Marquis de Trégars; of the second she had never known but the first name, Frederic. I tried to ascertain what had become of Madame Deville; but the worthy concierge swore to me that she did not know. One morning like a person who is going to emigrate or who wishes to disappear from amongst her acquaintances Madame Deville had sent for a furniture-dealer, and a dealer in second-hand clothes, and had sold them everything she had, going away with nothing but a little leather satchel, in which were her jewels and her money."

The baroness de Thaller still kept a good countenance. After examining her for a moment with a sort of eager curiosity, Marius de Trégars went on: "When I communicated this information to my friend, the commissary of police, he shook his head. 'Two years ago,' he told me 'that would have been more than sufficient to find those people; for the public records would have given us at once the key of this enigma. But we have had the war and the Commune; and the books of record are all burnt. Still we must not give in. A last hope remains; and I know a man who is capable of realizing it. Two days after he brought me an excellent fellow, named Victor Chupin, in whom I could have entire confidence; for he was recommended to me by one of the men whom I like and esteem the most, the Duke de Champdoce. Giving up all idea of applying at the various mayors' offices, Victor Chupin with the patience and the tenacity of an Indian following a trail, began searching the districts of Grenelle, Vaugirard, and the Invalides. And not in vain; for at the end of a week he brought me a monthly nurse, residing in the Rue de l'Université, who remembered perfectly having once attended on the occasion of her confinement, a remark-

ably pretty young woman, living in the Rue des Bergers, and nicknamed the Marchioness de Javelle. And as she was a very orderly woman, who at all times had kept a very exact account of her receipts, she brought me a little book in which I read this entry ; 'For attending Euphrasie Taponnet alias the Marchioness de Javelle, a girl, one hundred francs.' And this is not all. This woman informed me that she had been requested to present the child at the mayor's office, and that she had been duly registered there under the names of Euphrasie Césarine Taponnet, born of Euphrasie Taponnet, laundress, and an unknown father. Finally she placed at my disposal her account-book and her testimony."

Taxed beyond measure, the baroness's energy was beginning to fail her ; she was turning ghastly pale under her rice-powder.

"You must understand, madame," continued Marius de Trégars in the same icy tone, "that this woman's testimony, together with the letters which are in my possession, enable me to establish in a court of justice the exact date of the birth of a daughter whom my father had of his mistress. But that is nothing as yet. With renewed zeal Victor Chupin resumed his investigations. He undertook the examination of the marriage-registers in all the parishes of Paris, and as early as the following week he discovered at Notre Dame de Lorette the entry of the marriage of Euphrasie Taponnet with Frederic de Thaller."

Though she must have expected that name, the baroness started up violently. "It's false !" she began in a choking voice.

A smile of ironical pity passed over Marius's lips. "Five minutes' reflection will prove to you that it is useless to deny," he interrupted. "But wait. In the books of that same church, Victor Chupin has found registered the baptism of a daughter of M. and Madame de Thaller, bearing the same christian names as the first one : Euphrasie Césarine."

Convulsively the baroness shrugged her shoulders. "What does all this prove ?" she asked.

"This proves, madame, the well-settled intention of substituting one child for another ; this proves that my father was impudently deceived when he was made to believe that the second Césarine was his daughter, the daughter in whose favour he had formerly disposed of over five hundred thousand francs ; this proves that there is somewhere in the world a poor girl who has been basely abandoned by her mother, the Marchioness de Javelle, now become the Baroness de Thaller."

"That is an infamous lie !" exclaimed the baroness, beside herself with terror and rage.

M. de Trégars bowed. "The evidence of the truth of my statements," he said, "I shall find at Louveciennes, and at the Hôtel des Folies, Boulevard du Temple, Paris."

Night had come. A footman entered carrying lamps, which he placed upon the mantelpiece. He was not altogether one minute in the little drawing-room ; but that one minute was enough to enable the Baroness de Thaller to recover her calmness, and to collect her ideas. When the footman retired she had made up her mind, with the resolute promptness of a person accustomed to perilous situations. She gave up the dispute, and drawing near to M. de Trégars, she said : "Enough allusions, let us speak frankly and face to face. What do you want ?"

But the change was too sudden not to arouse Marius's suspicions. "I want a great many things," he replied.

"Still, you must specify."

"Well, I claim first the five hundred thousand francs which my father had settled upon his daughter, the daughter whom you cast off."

"And what next?"

"I want, besides, my own and my father's fortune, of which M. de Thaller robbed us, with your assistance."

"Well, is that all!"

M. de Trégars shook his head. "That is nothing as yet," he replied.

"Oh!"

"We have now to say something of Vincent Favoral's affairs."

An attorney who is defending the interests of a client is neither calmer nor cooler than was Madame de Thaller at that moment. "Do the affairs of my husband's cashier concern me, then?" she asked with a shade of irony.

"Yes, madame, very much."

"I am glad to hear it."

"I know it from an excellent source, because, on my return from Louve-ciennes, I called in the Rue du Cirque, where I saw Madame Zélie Cadelle."

He thought that the baroness would at least start on hearing that name. Not at all. With a look of profound astonishment she repeated, like a person who is making a prodigious effort of memory: "Rue du Cirque! Zélie Cadelle! Really, I do not understand."

But, from the glance which M. de Trégars cast upon her, she must have understood that she would not easily draw from him the particulars which he had resolved not to tell. "I believe, on the contrary," he said, "that you understand perfectly."

"Be it so, if you insist upon it. What do you ask for Favoral?"

"I demand, not for Favoral, but for the shareholders who have been impudently defrauded, the twelve millions which are missing from the Mutual Credit Bank."

Madame de Thaller burst out laughing. "Only that?" she asked.

"Yes, only that!"

"Well, then, it seems to me that you should address your reclamations to M. Favoral himself. You have the right to run after him."

"It is useless, for the reason that it is not he, the poor fool, who has carried off the twelve millions."

"Who has them, then?"

"The Baron de Thaller, no doubt."

"You are mad, my poor marquis," said Madame de Thaller with that accent of pity which one assumes to reply to an absurd proposition.

"You do not think so."

"But suppose I should refuse to do anything more?"

He fixed upon her a glance in which she could read an irrevocable determination: "I have a perfect horror of scandal," he replied slowly, "and, as you perceive, I am trying to arrange everything quietly between ourselves. But, if I do not succeed thus, I must appeal to the law-courts."

"Where are your proofs?"

"Do not be afraid; I have proofs to sustain all my allegations."

The baroness reclined comfortably in her arm-chair. "May one know them?" she inquired.

Marius was getting somewhat uneasy in the presence of Madame de Thaller's imperturbable assurance. What hope had she? Could she see some means of escape from a situation apparently so desperate? Determined to prove to her that all was lost, and that she had nothing to do but

to surrender, he replied : "Oh ! I know, madame, that you have taken your precautions. But when Providence interferes, you see, human foresight does not amount to much. See, rather, what happens in regard to your first daughter, the one you had when you were still only Marchioness de Javelle." And briefly he related to her the principal incidents of Made-moiselle Lucienne's life from the time that she had left her with the poor gardeners at Louveciennes, without giving either her name or her address ; the injury the young girl had received by being run over by Madame de Thaller's carriage ; the long letter she had written from the hospital, begging for assistance ; her visit to the house, and her meeting with the Baron de Thaller ; the effort to induce her to emigrate to America ; her arrest by means of false information, and her acquittal, thanks to the kind police-officer ; the attempt upon her life as she was going home late one night ; and, finally, her imprisonment after the Commune, among the *pétroleuses*, and her release through the interference of the same honest friend. And charging her with the responsibility of all these infamous acts, he paused for an answer or a protest. But as Madame de Thaller said nothing, he resumed : "You are looking at me, madame, and wondering how I have discovered all this. A single word will explain it all. The police-officer who saved your daughter is precisely the same to whom it was once my good fortune to render a service. By comparing notes we have gradually reached the truth, and reached you, madame. Will you acknowledge now that I have more proofs than are necessary to apply to justice?"

Whether she acknowledged it or not, she did not condescend to argue. "What then?" she asked coldly.

But M. de Trégars was too much on his guard to expose himself, by continuing to speak thus, to reveal the secret of his designs. Besides, whilst he was thoroughly satisfied as to the manœuvres used to defraud his father, he had, as yet, but presumptions on what concerned Vincent Favoral. "Permit me not to say another word, madame," he replied. "I have told you enough to enable you to judge of the value of my weapons."

She must have felt that she could not make him change his mind, for she rose from her chair. "That is sufficient," she said. "I will reflect ; and to-morrow I will give you an answer."

She was about to leave the room ; but M. de Trégars quickly placed himself between her and the door. "Excuse me," he said ; "but it is not to-morrow that I want an answer, it is to-night, this instant !"

Ah, if she could but have annihilated him with a look ! "Why, this is violence !" she said in a voice which betrayed the incredible effort she was making to control herself.

"It is imposed upon me by circumstances, madame."

"You would be less exacting if my husband were here."

He must have been within hearing ; for the door immediately opened, and he appeared upon the threshold. There are people for whom the unforeseen does not exist, and whom no event can disconcert. Having ventured everything, they expect everything. Such was the Baron de Thaller. With a sagacious glance he examined his wife and M. de Trégars : and in a cordial tone he said : "Why you are quarrelling here?"

"I am glad you have come !" exclaimed the baroness.

"What is the matter?"

"The matter is that M. de Trégars is endeavouring to take an odious advantage of some incidents of our past life."

"There's woman's exaggeration for you !" said M. de Thaller laughing.

And holding out his hand to Marius, he added : "Let me make your peace for you, my dear marquis ; it is within my province as husband."

But instead of taking his extended hand, M. de Trégars stepped back. "There is no more peace possible between us, sir : I am an enemy."

"An enemy !" repeated the baron in a tone of surprise which was wonderfully well assumed, if it was not real.

"Yes," interrupted the baroness ; "and I must speak to you at once, Frederic. Come, M. de Trégars will wait for you." And she led her husband into the adjoining room, not without first casting upon Marius a look of triumphant hatred.

Left alone M. de Trégars sat down. Far from annoying him, this sudden intervention of the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank seemed to him a stroke of fortune. It spared him an explanation more painful still than the first, and the unpleasant necessity of having to confound a villain by proving his infamy to him. "And besides," he thought, "when the husband and the wife have consulted with each other, they will acknowledge that they cannot resist, and that it is best to surrender." The deliberation was brief. In less than ten minutes M. de Thaller returned alone. He was pale ; and his face expressed well the grief of an honest man who discovers too late that he has misplaced his confidence.

"My wife has told me all, sir," he began.

M. de Trégars had risen. "Well ?" he asked.

"You see me distressed. Ah, marquis, how could I ever expect such a thing from you ? you whom I thought I had the right to look upon as a friend. Yet it is you, who when a great misfortune befalls me, attempts to give me the finishing stroke. It is you who would crush me under the weight of slanders gathered in the gutter."

M. de Trégars stopped him with a gesture. "Madame de Thaller cannot have correctly repeated my words to you, else you would not utter that word 'slander.'"

"She has repeated them to me without the least change."

"Then she cannot have told you the importance of the proofs I have in my possession."

"There is scarcely a family," resumed the baron, "in which there is not one of those painful secrets which one tries to withhold from the wickedness of the world. There is one in mine. Yes, it is true, that before our marriage my wife had a child, whom poverty had compelled her to abandon. We have since done everything that was humanly possible to find that child, but without success. It is a great misfortune which has weighed upon our life ; but it is not a crime. If, however, you deem it your interest to divulge our secret, and to disgrace a woman, you are free to do so ; I cannot prevent you. But I declare to you that is the only fact in all your accusations. You say that your father was duped and defrauded. From whom did you get such an idea ? From Marcolet, doubtless, a man without a character, who has become my mortal enemy since the day when he tried a sharp game on me, and came out second best. Or from Costeclar, perhaps, who does not forgive me for having refused him my daughter's hand, and who hates me because I know that he committed forgery once, and that he would be in prison but for your father's extreme indulgence. Well Costeclar and Marcolet have deceived you. If the Marquis de Trégars ruined himself it is because he undertook a business that he knew nothing about, and speculated right and left. It does not take long to lose a fortune, even without the assistance of thieves. As to pretending that I have benefited

by the embezzlements of my cashier, that is simply stupid ; and there can be no one to suggest such a thing, except Jottras and Saint-Pavin, two scoundrels whom I have had ten times the opportunity to send to prison, and who were Favoral's accomplices. Besides, the matter is in the hands of justice ; and I shall prove in the broad daylight of the court-room as I have already done in the office of the investigating magistrate, that to save the Mutual Credit Bank, I have sacrificed more than half my private fortune."

"Conclude, sir," harshly interrupted M. de Trégars tired of this speech, the evident object of which was to lead him to discuss, and to betray himself.

"To conclude is easy enough," replied the baron still in the same placid tone. "My wife has told me that you are about to marry the daughter of my old cashier ; a very charming girl, but without a sou. She must have a dowry."

"Sir !"

"Let us show our hands. I am in a critical position ; you know it, and you are trying to take advantage of it. Very well ; we can still come to an understanding. What would you say, if I were to give to Mademoiselle Gilberte the dowry I intended for my daughter ?"

All M. de Trégars's blood rushed to his face. "Ah, not another word ?" he exclaimed with a violent gesture. But controlling himself almost at once, he added : "I demand my father's fortune. I demand that you restore to the Mutual Credit Bank the twelve millions which have been abstracted."

"And if not ?"

"Then I shall place the matter in the hands of the police."

They remained for a moment face to face, looking into each other's eyes. At length, M. de Trégars asked : "What have you decided ?"

Without, perhaps, suspecting that his offer was a fresh insult, M. de Thaller replied : "I will go as far as fifteen hundred thousand francs, and I will pay cash."

"Is that your last word ?"

"It is."

"If I inform against you, with the proofs in my hands, you are lost."

"We'll see about that."

To insist further would have been puerile. "Very well, we'll see, then," said M. de Trégars. And he walked out.

As he got into his cab, which had been waiting for him at the door, he could not help wondering what gave the Baron de Thaller so much assurance, and whether he was not mistaken in his conjectures. It was nearly eight o'clock, and Maxence, Madame Favoral, and Mademoiselle Gilberte must have been waiting for him with feverish impatience ; but he had eaten nothing since morning, and he stopped the cab in front of one of the restaurants of the Boulevard. He had just ordered his dinner, when a middle-aged gentleman, but active and vigorous still, of military bearing, wearing a moustache and with multi-coloured decorations at his buttonhole, came and took a seat at the adjoining table. In less than fifteen minutes M. de Trégars had despatched a bowl of soup and a slice of beef, and was hastening out, when, without his being able to understand how it had happened, his foot struck his neighbour's leg. Though fully convinced that it was not his fault, he hastened to apologise. But the other began to talk angrily, and so loud, that everybody turned round. Vexed as he was, Marius renewed

his apologies. But the other, like those cowards who think they have found a greater coward than themselves, was pouring forth a torrent of the grossest insults. M. de Trégars was lifting his hand to administer a well-deserved correction, when suddenly the scene in the principal drawing-room of the De Thaller mansion came back vividly to his mind. He saw again, as in the mirror, the ill-looking man listening, with an anxious look, to Madame de Thaller's propositions, and afterwards sitting down to write. "That's it!" he exclaimed, a multitude of circumstances occurring to his mind, which had escaped him at the moment. And, without further reflection, seizing his adversary by the throat, he threw him over on the table, holding him down with his knee.

"I am sure he has the letter about him," he said to the people who surrounded them.

And in fact he did take from the breast pocket of the villain's coat, a letter which he unfolded and read aloud: "I am waiting for you, my dear major come quickly, for the thing is pressing. A troublesome gentleman who is to be made to keep quiet. It will be for you the matter of a sword-thrust, and for us the occasion to share a pretty large amount." "And that's why he picked a quarrel with me," added M. de Trégars.

Two waiters took hold of the villain, who was struggling furiously, and they talked of handing him over to the police.

"What is the use?" said Marius. "I have his letter, and that is enough. The police will find him when they want him." And, re-entering his cab, he said to the driver: "Rue St. Gilles, as quickly as possible."

VII.

IN the Rue St. Gilles the hours were dragging along, slow and gloomy. After Maxence left to go and meet M. de Trégars, Madame Favoral and her daughter remained alone with M. Chapelain, and were compelled to bear the brunt of his wrath, and to hear his interminable complaints. He was certainly an excellent man, the old lawyer, and too just to hold either Mademoiselle Gilberte or her mother responsible for Vincent Favoral's acts. He spoke the truth when he stated that he entertained for them a sincere affection, and that they might rely upon his devotion. But he had lost a hundred and sixty thousand francs; and a man who loses such a large sum is naturally in a bad humour, and not much disposed to optimism. The cruellest enemies of the poor women would not have tortured them more mercilessly than this devoted friend. He did not spare them a single sad detail of the meeting at the Mutual Credit Bank, from which he had just come. He exaggerated the proud assurance of the manager, and the confiding simplicity of the shareholders. "The Baron de Thaller," he said to them, "is certainly the most impudent scoundrel and the cleverest rascal I have ever met with. You'll see that he'll get out of it with clean hands and full pockets. Whether or not he has accomplices, Vincent will be the scapegoat. We must make up our minds to that." His desire was to console Madame Favoral and Gilberte; but had he sworn to drive them to distraction, he could not have succeeded better. "Poor women!" he added, "what is to become of you? Maxence is a good and honest fellow, I am sure, but so weak, so thoughtless, so fond of pleasure! He finds it difficult enough to get along by himself. Of what assistance will he be to you?" Then came advice. Madame Favoral, he declared, should not

hesitate to ask for a separation, which she would certainly obtain. For want of this precaution, she would remain all her life under the burden of her husband's debts, and constantly exposed to the annoyances of his creditors. And continually he wound up by saying: "Who would ever have expected such a thing of Vincent, a friend of twenty years' standing! A hundred and sixty thousand francs! Who in the world can be trusted now?"

Big tears were rolling slowly down Madame Favoral's withered cheeks. But Mademoiselle Gilberte was of those for whom the pity of others is the worst misfortune and the most acute suffering. Twenty times she was on the point of exclaiming: "Keep your compassion, sir; we are neither so much to be pitied nor so much forsaken as you seem to think. Our misfortune has revealed to us a true friend; one who does not speak, but who acts." At last, as twelve o'clock struck, M. Chapelain withdrew, announcing that he would return the next day to hear if there was any news, and to bring further consolation. "Thank heaven, we are alone at last!" said Mademoiselle Gilberte. But they had not much peace, for all that. Great as had been the noise of Vincent Favoral's disaster, it had not at once reached all those who had intrusted their savings to him. All day long the belated creditors kept arriving; and the scenes of the morning were renewed on a smaller scale. Then summonses began to pour in, three or four at a time. Madame Favoral was losing all courage. "What disgrace!" she groaned. "Will it always be so hereafter?" And she exhausted herself in useless conjectures upon the causes of the catastrophe; and such was the disorder of her mind, that she knew not what to hope nor what to fear, and from one minute to another she wished for the most contradictory things. She would have been glad to hear that her husband was safe out of the country, and yet she would have deemed herself less miserable had she known that he was hidden somewhere in Paris. And the same questions obstinately returned to her lips: "Where is he now? What is he doing? What is he thinking about? How can he leave us without news? Is it possible that it is a woman who has driven him into the precipice? And if so, who is the woman?" Very different were Mademoiselle Gilberte's thoughts. The great calamity that had befallen her family had brought about the sudden realisation of her hopes. Her father's disaster had given her an opportunity to test the man she loved; and she had found him even superior to all that she could have dared to dream. The name of Favoral was forever disgraced; but, all the same, she was going to be Marius's wife, the Marchioness de Trégars. And, in the candour of her loyal soul, she accused herself of not taking enough interest in her mother's grief.

"Where is Maxence?" asked Madame Favoral. "Where is M. de Trégars? Why have they told us nothing of their projects?"

"They will, no doubt, be home to dinner," replied Gilberte.

So well was she convinced of this, that she had given orders to the servant to have a somewhat better dinner than usual; and her heart was beating loudly at the thought of being seated near Marius, between her mother and her brother. At about six o'clock the bell rang violently. "There he is!" exclaimed the young girl, rising to her feet. But no; it was only the concierge, bringing up a summons ordering Madame Favoral, under penalty of the law, to appear the next day, at one o'clock precisely, before the investigating magistrate, Barban d'Avranchel, at his office in the Palais de Justice. The poor woman very nearly fainted. "What can this

magistrate want with me?" she asked. "It ought to be forbidden to call a wife to testify against her husband."

"M. de Trégars will tell you what to answer, mamma," said Mademoiselle Gilberte.

Meantime, seven o'clock struck, then eight, and still neither Maxence nor M. de Trégars had arrived. Both mother and daughter were becoming very anxious, when at last, a little before nine, they heard steps in the passage. Marius de Trégars appeared almost immediately. He was very pale, and his face bore the trace of the crushing fatigues of the day, of the cares which oppressed him, of the reflections which had been suggested to his mind by the quarrel of which he had nearly been the victim a few moments since. "Is not Maxence here?" he asked at once.

"We have not seen him," answered Mademoiselle Gilberte.

He seemed so much surprised, that Madame Favoral was frightened. "What is the matter now?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing, madame," replied M. de Trégars, "nothing that need alarm you. Compelled about two hours ago to part from Maxence, I was to have met him here. Since he has not yet come, he must have been detained. I know where; and I will ask your permission to run and join him."

He went out; but Gilberte followed him into the passage, and taking his hand, she said: "How kind of you! and how can we ever sufficiently thank you?"

He interrupted her. "You owe me no thanks, my beloved; for in what I am doing, there is more selfishness than you think. It is my own cause, more than yours, that I am defending. Any way, everything is going on well."

And without giving any more explanations, he started off. He had no doubt that Maxence, after leaving him, had hastened to the Hôtel des Folies to give Mademoiselle Lucienne an account of the day's work. And though somewhat annoyed that he had tarried so long, on second thoughts, he was not surprised. It was, therefore, to the Hôtel des Folies that he was going. Now that he had unmasked his batteries and begun the struggle, he was not sorry to meet Mademoiselle Lucienne. In less than five minutes he had reached the Boulevard du Temple. In front of the Fortins' narrow corridor a dozen idlers were standing talking. M. de Trégars listened to their conversation as he entered.

"It is a frightful accident," said one, "such a pretty girl, and so young too!"

"As for me," said another, "it is the driver that I pity the most; for after all, if that pretty miss was in the carriage, it was for her own pleasure; whereas, the poor coachman was only attending to his business."

A confused presentiment oppressed M. de Trégars's heart. Addressing himself to one of these worthy citizens, he asked: "Have you heard any particulars?"

"Certainly I have," replied the man flattered by confidence. "I didn't see the accident with my own eyes; but my wife saw it. It was terrible. The carriage, a magnificent private carriage too, came from the direction of the Madeleine. The horses had run away; and already there had been an accident in the Place du Château d'Eau, where an old woman had been knocked down. Suddenly over there, opposite the toy-shop, which is mine, by the way, the wheel of the carriage caught the wheel of an enormous waggon, and everything was upset, the coachman was thrown off his seat, and the young lady who was inside was thrown out; a very pretty girl who lives in this hotel."

Leaving the obliging narrator, M. de Trégars hastened along the narrow corridor of the Hôtel des Folies. At the moment he reached the yard, he found himself face to face with Maxence. Extremely pale, his head bare, with wild eyes, and shaking frightfully, the poor fellow looked like a madman. "Ah, my friend!" he exclaimed, noticing M. de Trégars, "what a misfortune!"

"Lucienne?"

"Dead, perhaps. The doctor will not answer for her recovery. I am going to the chemist's to get a prescription made up."

He was interrupted by the commissary of police, whose kind protection had hitherto preserved Mademoiselle Lucienne. He was coming out of the little room on the ground-floor, which the Fortins used as office, bedroom, and dining-room. Recognizing Marius de Trégars, he came up to him, and pressed his hand saying: "Well, you know?"

"Yes."

"It is my fault, marquis; for I was fully warned. I knew so well that Mademoiselle Lucienne's existence was threatened, I was so fully expecting another attempt upon her life, that whenever she went out for a drive, it was one of my men, wearing a footman's livery, who took his seat by the side of the coachman. To-day my man was so busy, that I said to myself: 'Never mind for once!' And behold the consequences!"

Maxence listened with inexpressible astonishment, and was greatly surprised to discover between Marius and the commissary an intimacy which is the result of long intercourse, real esteem, and common hopes.

"It is not an accident, then," remarked M. de Trégars.

"No."

"The coachman has spoken, no doubt?"

"No, the wretch was killed on the spot. But don't let us stay here," added the commissary without waiting for another question. "Whilst Maxence runs to the chemist's, let us go into the Fortins' room."

The husband was alone there, the wife being at that moment with Mademoiselle Lucienne. "Do me the favour to go and take a walk for about fifteen minutes," said the commissary to him. "We wish to be alone." Humbly and without a word, M. Fortin slipped out.

"It is clear, marquis, it is manifest that a crime has been committed," resumed the commissary at once. "Listen, and judge for yourself. I was just rising from dinner, when I was notified of what was called poor Lucienne's accident. Without even changing my clothes, I hastened here. The carriage was lying in the street, broken to pieces. Two policemen were holding the horses, which had been stopped. I made inquiries and learnt that Lucienne, picked up by Maxence, had been able to drag herself as far as the hotel, and that the driver had been taken to the nearest chemist's. Furious at my own negligence, and tormented by vague suspicions, it was to the chemist's that I went first. The driver was lying in a backroom, on a mattress. His skull having struck the angle of the curbstone, was broken open; and he had just breathed his last. It was apparently the annihilation of the hope which I had of enlightening myself by questioning him. Nevertheless, I gave orders to have him searched. No paper was discovered upon him which could establish his identity; but in one of the pockets of his trousers, what do you think was found? Twenty bank-notes of a hundred francs each, carefully wrapped up in a piece of newspaper."

M. de Trégars shuddered. "What a revelation!" he murmured.

It was not to the present circumstance that Marius applied the word.

But the commissary naturally mistook him. "Yes," he went on, "it was a revelation. To me these two thousand francs were worth a confession; they could only be the wages of a crime. So without losing a moment, I jumped into a cab and drove to Brion's. Everybody was greatly excited, because the horses had just then been brought back. I questioned, and from the very first answers, the correctness of my presumption was demonstrated to me. The wretch who had just died was not one of Brion's coachmen. This is what had happened. At two o'clock when the carriage ordered by M. Van-Klopen was ready to go for Mademoiselle Lucienne, they had been compelled to send for the driver and the footman, who had forgotten themselves drinking in a neighbouring wine-shop, with a man who had called to see them in the morning. They were slightly under the influence of wine, but not enough so to make it imprudent to trust them with horses; and it was even probable that the fresh air would sober them completely. They started; but they did not go very far, for one of their comrades saw them stop the carriage in front of a wine-shop, and rejoin the same individual with whom they had been drinking all the morning—"

"And who was no other than the man who is dead?"

"Wait. Having obtained this information, I got some one to take me to the wine-shop, and I asked for the coachman and the footman from Brion's. They were still there; and they were shown to me lying on the floor fast asleep in a private room. I tried to wake them up, but in vain. I had water thrown on them freely; but a whole bucketful had no effect, save to make them utter a few inarticulate groans. I at once guessed what they had taken. I sent for a doctor and asked the landlord for explanations. It was his wife and his potman who answered me. They told me that about two o'clock, a man entered the shop and stated that he was employed at Brion's, and ordered three glasses of wine for himself and two comrades, whom he was expecting. A few moments later a carriage stopped at the door; and the driver and the footman entered. They were in a great hurry they said, and only wished to take one glass. They, however, took three, one after another; then they ordered a bottle. They were evidently forgetting their horses, which they had left in charge of a commissionaire. Soon the man proposed a game at cards. The others accepted and were soon installed in the private-room, knocking on the table for some better wine. The game must have lasted at least twenty minutes. At the end of that time, the man who had come in first appeared, looking very much annoyed, saying that it was very unpleasant that his comrades were dead drunk, that they would miss their appointment, and that their master who is anxious to please his customers, would certainly dismiss them. Although he had taken as much, and even more than the others, he was perfectly steady; and after reflecting for a moment, he said: 'I have an idea. Friends should help each other, shouldn't they? I will put on the coachman's livery, and drive in his stead. I happen to know the customer he was going for. She is a very kind old lady, and I'll tell her a story to explain the absence of the footman.' Convinced that the man was in Brion's employment, the landlord's wife had no objection to offer to this fine project. The villain put on the sleeping coachman's livery, got on the box, and drove off, after stating that he would return for his comrades as soon as he had got through the job, and that doubtless they would be sober by that time."

M. de Trégars knew well enough the commissary's energy not to be surprised at his promptness in obtaining precise information. The latter continued: "Just as I was closing my examination, the doctor arrived. I

showed him the drunkards ; and he at once recognized that I had guessed correctly, and that the men had been sent to sleep by means of one of those narcotics of which certain thieves make use to rob their victims. A potion, which he administered to them by forcing their teeth open with a knife, brought them to their senses. They opened their eyes, and were soon in a condition to reply to my questions. They were furious at the trick that had been played upon them ; but they do not know the man. They swear they saw him for the first time this very morning ; and they are ignorant even of his name."

There was no doubt possible after such complete explanations. The commissary had formed a correct opinion, and he proved it. Mademoiselle Lucienne had not just been the victim of a vulgar accident, but of a crime laboriously conceived, and executed with unheard-of audacity ; of one of those crimes of which too many are committed, and which, nine times out of ten, dispel suspicion, and foil all the efforts of human justice. M. de Trégars understood now what had taken place, as clearly as if he had himself received the confessions of the guilty parties. A man had been found to execute this perilous programme : to make the horses run away, and then to run into some heavy wagon. The wretch was staking his life at the game, it being evident that the light carriage must be smashed to bits. But he had probably relied upon his skill and his presence of mind to avoid the shock and to jump off safe and sound ; whilst Mademoiselle Lucienne, thrown upon the pavement, would most likely be killed on the spot. The event had deceived his expectations, and he had fallen a victim to his own rascality ; but his death was a misfortune.

"It is very unfortunate," resumed the commissary, "that the villain is dead ; for now the thread which would infallibly have led us to the truth is broken in our hands. Who is it that ordered the crime, and who paid for it ? We know, since we know who benefits by the crime. But that is not sufficient. Justice requires something more than moral proofs. Living, the scoundrel would have spoken. His death insures the impunity of the wretches who employed him."

"Perhaps," said M. de Trégars. And at the same time he withdrew from his pocket, and showed the commissary the letter found in Vincent Favoral's notebook, that letter so obscure the day before, but now so terribly clear : "I cannot understand your negligence. You should get that Van-Klopen matter over. There is the danger."

The commissary of police cast but a glance upon it, and, replying to the objections of his old experience rather more than addressing himself to M. de Trégars, he murmured : "There can be no doubt about it. It is to the crime committed to-day that these pressing recommendations relate ; and, directed as they are to Vincent Favoral, they attest his complicity. It was he who had undertaken to finish the Van-Klopen affair ; in other words, to get rid of Lucienne. It was he, I'd wager my head, who treated with the false coachman." He remained for over a minute absorbed in his own thoughts, then he asked : "But who is the author of these recommendations to Vincent Favoral ; do you know that, marquis ?"

They looked at each other ; and the same name rose to their lips : "The Baroness de Thaller !" This name, however, they did not utter.

The commissary drew near to the gas-burner which lighted the Fortins' room ; and, adjusting his glasses, he scrutinized the note with the most minute attention, studying the grain and the transparency of the paper, the ink, and the handwriting. "This note," declared he at last, "is not

sufficient to constitute a proof against its author: I mean an evident, material proof, such as we require to obtain an order to arrest. It is written with the left hand, with common ink, on ordinary foolscap paper, such as is found everywhere. Now all left-hand writings look alike. Draw your own conclusions."

But M. de Trégars did not give it up yet. "Wait a moment," he interrupted. And briefly, though with the utmost exactness, he related his visit to the De Thaller mansion, his conversation with Mademoiselle Césarine, then with the baroness, and finally with the baron himself. He described in the most graphic manner the scene which had taken place in the principal drawing-room between Madame de Thaller and a more than suspicious-looking man, that scene which had been revealed to him in its minutest details by the looking-glass. Its meaning was now as clear as day. This suspicious-looking man had been one of the agents in arranging the intended murder; hence the baroness's agitation when she received his card, and her haste to join him. If she started when he first spoke to her, it was because he was telling her of the successful execution of the crime. If she afterwards made a gesture of joy, it was because he had just informed her that the coachman had been killed at the same time, and that she found herself thus rid of a dangerous accomplice.

The commissary of police nodded his head. "All this is quite probable," he murmured; "but that's all."

Again M. de Trégars interrupted him. "I have not done yet," he said. And he told how he had been suddenly and brutally insulted by an unknown man in a restaurant; how he had seized hold of the abject scoundrel, and taken out of his pocket a letter, which left no doubt as to the nature of his intentions.

"The letter!" exclaimed the commissary with sparkling eyes; "show me the letter!" And, as soon as he had looked over it, he added: "Ah! This time, I think that we have something tangible. 'A troublesome gentleman to keep quiet.' The Marquis de Trégars, of course, who is on the right track. 'It will be for you the matter of a sword-thrust.' Naturally, dead men tell no tales. 'And for us the occasion to share a pretty large amount.' An honest trade, indeed!" The good man was rubbing his hands together with all his might. "At last we have a positive fact," he continued, "a foundation upon which to base our accusations. Don't be uneasy. This letter is going to place in our hands the scoundrel who assaulted you; he will make known the go-between, who himself will not fail to surrender the Baroness de Thaller. Lucienne will be avenged! If we could only now lay our hands on Vincent Favoral! But we'll find him yet. I set two fellows after him this afternoon, who have a superior scent, and understand their business."

He was here interrupted by Maxence, who was returning all out of breath, holding in his hand the medicines which he had gone after. "I thought the chemist would never have finished," he said. And regretting to have remained away so long, and feeling uneasy, he prepared to return upstairs. "Don't you wish to see Lucienne?" he added, addressing himself more to M. de Trégars than to the commissary. For all answer, they followed him at once.

A cheerless-looking place was Mademoiselle Lucienne's room, without other furniture than a narrow iron bedstead, a dilapidated bureau, four straw-bottomed chairs, and a small table. Over the bed, and at the windows, were white calico curtains, with an edging that had once been

blue, but which had become yellow from repeated washings. Often Maxence had begged his friend to take a more comfortable lodging, and always she had refused. "I must economize," she would say. "This room does well enough for me; and, besides, I am accustomed to it." When M. de Trégars and the commissary entered, the estimable hostess of the *Hôtel des Folies* was kneeling in front of the fire, preparing some ptisan. Hearing the footsteps, she got up, and, placing a finger upon her lips, she said: "Hush! Be careful not to wake her!"

The precaution was needless. "I am not asleep," said Mademoiselle Lucienne in a feeble voice. "Who is there?"

"I," replied Maxence, advancing towards the bed.

It was only necessary to see the poor girl in order to understand Maxence's frightful anxiety. She was whiter than the sheet; and fever, that horrible fever which follows severe wounds, gave a sinister lustre to her eyes. "But you are not alone," she resumed.

"I am with him, my child," said the commissary. "I come to beg your pardon for having so badly protected you."

She shook her head with a sad and gentle motion. "It was myself who lacked prudence," she interrupted; "for to-day, while out, I thought I noticed something wrong; but it seemed so foolish to be afraid! If it had not happened to-day, it would have happened some other day. The villains who have been pursuing me for years must be satisfied now. They will soon be rid of me."

"Lucienne," murmured Maxence in a sorrowful tone.

M. de Trégars now stepped forward. "You will live, mademoiselle," he said, in a grave voice. "You will live to learn to love life." And as she looked at him in surprise, "You do not know me," he added.

"You," she said timidly, and as if doubting the reality, "the Marquis de Trégars!"

"Yes, mademoiselle, your brother."

Had he had the control of events, Marius de Trégars would probably not have been in such haste to reveal this fact. But how could he ignore his feelings in presence of this poor girl who was, perhaps, about to die, a sacrifice to the terrors and the covetousness of the wretched being who was her mother,—to die at twenty, victim of the basest and most odious of crimes? How could he help feeling an intense pity at the sight of this unfortunate young woman who had endured everything that a human being can suffer, whose life had been nothing but a long and painful struggle, whose courage had risen above all the woes of adversity, and who had been able to pass without a stain through the mud and mire of Paris? Besides, Marius was not one of those men who mistrust their first impulse, who manifest their emotion only for a purpose, who reflect and calculate before giving themselves up to the inspirations of their heart. Lucienne was the Marquis de Trégars's daughter, of that he was absolutely certain. He knew that the same blood flowed in his veins and in hers; and he told her so. He told her so, above all, because he believed her in danger; and he wished, were she to die, that she should have had, at least, that supreme joy.

Poor Lucienne! Never had she dared to dream of such happiness. All her blood rushed to her cheeks; and, in a voice vibrating with the most intense emotion, she exclaimed: "Ah! now, yes, I would like to live."

The commissary of police also felt moved. "Do not be alarmed, my child," he said in his kindest tone. "Before two weeks are over you will be up again. M. de Trégars is a famous doctor."

In the mean time, she had attempted to raise herself on her pillow ; and that simple effort had wrung a cry of anguish from her. "Oh dear ! How I suffer !"

"That's because you won't keep still, my darling," said Madame Fortin in a tone of gentle scolding. "Have you forgotten that the doctor expressly forbade you to move ?"

Then drawing the commissary, Maxence, and M. de Trégars aside, she explained to them how imprudent it was to disturb Mademoiselle Lucienne's rest. She was very ill, affirmed the worthy hostess ; and her advice was, that they should send for a nurse as soon as possible. She would have been extremely happy, of course, to spend the night by the side of her dear lodger ; but, unfortunately, she could not think of it, the hotel requiring all her time and attention. Fortunately, however, she knew in the neighbourhood a widow, a very worthy woman, and without her equal in nursing the sick. With an anxious and beseeching look, Maxence consulted M. de Trégars. In his eyes could be read the proposition that was burning upon his lips : "Shall I not go for Gilberte ?"

But that proposition he had no time to express. Though they had been speaking very low, Mademoiselle Lucienne had heard. "I have a friend," she said, "who would certainly be willing to sit up with me."

"What friend ?" inquired the commissary of police.

"You know her very well, sir. It is that poor girl who received me at her home at Batignolles when I left the hospital ; who came to my assistance during the Commune ; and whom you helped to get released from the Versailles prison."

"Do you know then what has become of her ?"

"Only since yesterday, when I received a letter from her, a very friendly letter. She writes that she has found money to set up a dressmaking establishment, and that she is relying upon me to be her forewoman. She is going to commence business in the Rue St. Lazare ; but, in the meantime, she is stopping in the Rue du Cirque."

M. de Trégars and Maxence started slightly. "What is your friend's name ?" they inquired at once.

"Zélie Cadelle."

Not being aware of the particulars of the two young men's visit to the Rue du Cirque, the commissary of police could not understand the cause of their agitation. "I think," he said, "that it would hardly be proper now to send for that girl."

"It is to her alone, on the contrary, that we must resort," interrupted M. de Trégars. And, as he had good reasons to mistrust Madame Fortin, he led the commissary outside the room, on to the landing ; and there, in a few words, he explained to him that this Zélie was precisely the same woman whom they had found in the Rue du Cirque, in that sumptuous mansion where Vincent Favoral, under the simple name of Vincent, had been living, according to the neighbours, in such a princely style.

The commissary of police was astounded. Why had he not known all this sooner ? Better late than never, however. "Ah ! you are right, Marquis, a hundred times right !" he declared. "This girl must evidently know Vincent Favoral's secret, the key of the enigma that we are vainly trying to solve. What she would not tell to you, a stranger, she will tell to Lucienne, her friend." Maxence offered to go himself for Zélie Cadelle.

"No," answered Marius. "If she should happen to know you, she would suspect something, and would refuse to come."

It was, therefore, M. Fortin who was despatched to the Rue du Cirque, and who went off grumbling, though he had received five francs to take a cab, and five francs for his trouble.

"And now," said the commissary of police to Maxence, "we must both of us get out of the way. I, because the fact of my being a commissary would frighten Madame Cadelle; you, because, being Vincent Favoral's son, your presence would certainly prove embarrassing to her."

And so they went out; but M. de Trégars did not long remain alone with Mademoiselle Lucienne. M. Fortin had had the delicacy not to tarry on the way. Eleven o'clock struck as Zélie Cadelle rushed like a whirlwind into her friend's room. Such had been her haste, that she had given no thought whatever to her dress. She had stuck upon her uncombed hair the first bonnet she could lay her hands upon, and had thrown an old shawl over the wrapper in which she had received Marius in the afternoon.

"What, my poor Lucienne!" she exclaimed. "Are you so ill as all that?" But she stopped short as she recognized M. de Trégars; and, in a suspicious tone, she said: "What a singular meeting!" Marius bowed. "You know Lucienne?"

What she meant by that he understood perfectly. "Lucienne is my sister, madame," he said coldly.

She shrugged her shoulders. "What humbug!"

"It's the truth," affirmed Mademoiselle Lucienne; "and you know that I never lie."

Madame Zélie was dumbfounded. "If you say so," she muttered. "But no matter; it's very queer."

"And, what's more," interrupted M. de Trégars, "it is because Lucienne is my sister that you see her there lying upon that bed. They attempted to murder her to-day!"

"Oh!"

"It was her mother who tried to get rid of her, so as to possess herself of the fortune which my father had left his daughter; and there is every reason to believe that the snare was contrived by Vincent Favoral."

Madame Zélie did not understand very well; but, when Marius and Mademoiselle Lucienne had informed her of all that it was useful for her to know, she exclaimed: "Why, what a horrible rascal that old Vincent must be!" And, as M. de Trégars said nothing, she continued: "This afternoon I didn't tell you any lies; but I didn't tell you everything, either." She stopped; but, after a moment of deliberation, "Well, so much the worse for old Vincent," she added. "Ah! he tried to have Lucienne killed, did he? Well, then, I am going to tell everything I know. First of all, he wasn't anything to me. It isn't very flattering; but it is so. He has never kissed so much as the tip of my finger. He used to say that he loved me, but that he respected me still more, because I looked so much like a daughter he had lost. The old humbug! And I believed him too! I did, upon my word, at least in the beginning; But I am not such a fool as I look. I found out very soon that he was making fun of me; and that he was only using me as a blind to keep suspicion away from another woman."

"From what woman?"

"Ah! that's just what I don't know! All I know is that she is married that he is crazy about her, and that they are to run away together."

"Has he not gone, then?"

Madame Cadelle's face had assumed a somewhat anxious expression, and

for over a minute she seemed to hesitate. "Do you know," she said at last, "that my answer is going to cost a lot? They have promised me a pile of money; but I haven't got it yet. And if I split, good-bye! I shan't have anything." M. de Trégars was opening his lips to tell her that she might rest easy on that score; but she interrupted him. "Well, no," she said: "old Vincent hasn't gone. He got up a comedy, so he told me, to throw the lady's husband off the track. He sent off a whole lot of luggage by the railway; but he remained in Paris."

"And do you know where he is hiding?"

"In the Rue St. Lazare, of course: in the apartment that I hired a fortnight ago."

"Would you consent to take me there?" asked M. de Trégars in a voice trembling with the excitement of almost certain success.

"Whenever you like—to-morrow."

VIII.

"THERE is nothing more to keep me at the Hôtel des Folies," said the commissary of police to Maxence as they left Mademoiselle Lucienne's room. "Everything possible will be done, and well done, by M. de Trégars. Therefore I am going back to my office; and I am going to take you with me. I have a great deal to do; and you can help me." That was not exactly true; but he feared some imprudence on the part of Maxence, which might compromise the success of M. de Trégars's mission. He was trying to think of everything, to leave as little as possible to chance, like a man who has seen the best combined plans fail for want of a trifling precaution.

As he had been away the whole evening, four or five persons were waiting for him at his office on matters of current business. He despatched them in less than no time; after which, addressing himself to an agent on duty, "This evening," he said, "at about nine o'clock, there was a row in a restaurant on the Boulevards. A person tried to pick a quarrel with another. You will proceed at once to that restaurant; you will get the particulars of what took place; and you will ascertain exactly who this man is, his name, his profession, and his place of residence."

"Can I have a description of him?" inquired the agent like a person accustomed to such errands.

"Yes. He is a man past middle age, military bearing, heavy moustache, wearing his hat on the side of his head."

"Yes, I see; one of your regular fighting fellows."

"Very well. Go then. I shall not retire before your return. Ah, I forgot; find out what was thought to-night at the little Bourse about the Mutual Credit Bank affair, and what was said of the arrest of one Saint-Pavin, editor of the 'Financial Pilot,' and of a banker named Jottras."

"Can I take a cab?"

"Yes."

The agent started; and he was not fairly out of the house, when the commissary, opening a door which gave access into a small study, called, "Felix!"

It was his secretary, a man of about thirty, fair, with a gentle and timid countenance, having with his long frock-coat, somewhat the appearance of a theological student. He appeared immediately. "Did you call me, sir?"

"My dear Felix," replied the commissary, "I have seen you, sometimes, imitate very nicely all sorts of hand-writings."

The secretary blushed very much, no doubt on account of Maxence, who was sitting by the side of his employer. He was a very honest fellow; but there are certain little talents of which people do not like to boast; and the talent of imitating the writing of others is of the number, for the reason that it at once fatally suggests the idea of forgery. "It was only for fun that I used to do that, sir," he stammered.

"Would you be here if it had been otherwise?" said the commissary. "Only this time it is not for fun, but to do me a favour, that I wish you to try again." And withdrawing from his pocket the letter M. de Trégars had taken from the man in the restaurant, he added: "Examine this writing, and see whether you feel capable of imitating it tolerably well."

Spreading the letter out under the full light of the lamp, the secretary spent at least two minutes examining it with the minute attention of an expert. And at the same time he muttered: "Not at all convenient, this. Hard writing to imitate. Not a salient feature, not a characteristic sign! Nothing which strikes the eye, or attracts attention. It must be some old lawyer's clerk who wrote this."

In spite of his anxiety of mind, the commissary could not help smiling: "I shouldn't be surprised if you had guessed right," he said.

"At any rate," declared Felix, thus encouraged, "I will try." He took a pen, and after trying several times, "How is this?" he asked, holding out a sheet of paper.

The commissary carefully compared the original with the copy. "It is not perfect," he murmured; "but at night-time and with the imagination excited by a great peril—Besides, we must risk something."

"If I had a few hours to practise!"

"But you have not. Come, take up your pen and write as well as you can, in that same hand, what I am going to tell you." And after a moment's thought, he dictated as follows: "All goes well, T. drawn into a quarrel, is to fight in the morning with swords. But our man, whom I cannot leave refuses to go further, unless he is paid two thousand francs before the duel. I have not the amount. Please hand it to the bearer who has orders to wait for you." The commissary, leaning over his secretary's shoulder was following his hand, and the last word being written. "Perfect!" he exclaimed. "Now, quick, the address: Baroness de Thaller, Rue de la Pépinière."

There are professions which extinguish all curiosity in those who exercise them. It was with the most complete indifference, and without asking a question, that the secretary did what had been requested of him.

"Now, my dear Felix," resumed the commissary, "you will please make yourself up as near as possible like a restaurant-waiter, and take this letter to its address."

"At this hour!"

"Yes. The Baroness de Thaller is at a ball. You will tell the servants that you are bringing her an answer concerning an important matter. They know nothing about it; but they will allow you to wait for their mistress in the concierge's lodge. As soon as she comes in you will hand her the letter, stating that two gentlemen who are taking supper in your restaurant are waiting for the answer. It may be that she will exclaim that you are a rogue, that she does not know what it means; in that case we shall have been anticipated, and you must get away as fast as you can. But the chances are, that she will give you the two thousand francs; and then you

must so manage, that she shall be plainly seen to give them you. Is it all understood?"

"Perfectly."

"Be quick, then, and do not lose a minute. I shall wait for you."

Away from Mademoiselle Lucienne, Maxence had gradually been recalled to the strangeness of the situation; and it was with mingled feelings of curiosity and surprise that he observed the commissary bustling about. The worthy man had found again all the activity of his youth, together with that fever of hope and that impatience of success, which usually disappear as one grows older. He was going over in his mind the whole of the case again—his first meeting with Mademoiselle Lucienne, the various attempts upon her life, and he had just taken out of a drawer the letter of information which had been intrusted to him, in order to compare the writing with that of the letter M. de Trégars had taken from his adversary, when Marius hurried in, all out of breath.

"Zélie has spoken!" he exclaimed. And at once turning to Maxence, "You, my dear friend," he added, "you must run to the Hôtel des Folies."

"Is Lucienne worse?"

"No. Lucienne is getting on well enough. Zélie has spoken; but there is no certainty, that after due reflection she will not repent, and go and give the alarm. You must return, therefore, and not lose sight of her until I call for her in the morning. If she wishes to go out you must prevent her."

The commissary understood the importance of the precaution. "You must prevent her," he added, "even by force; and I authorize you, if need be, to call the agent whom I have placed on duty outside the Hôtel des Folies, and whom I will warn immediately."

Maxence started off at a run.

"Poor fellow!" murmured Marius, "I know where your father is. What are we going to learn now?"

He had scarcely had time to communicate the information he had received from Madame Cadelle, when the first of the commissary's emissaries made his appearance. "The commission is executed," he said, in the confident tone of a man who thinks he has successfully accomplished a difficult task.

"You know the name of the individual who sought a quarrel with M. de Trégars?" asked the commissary.

"His name is Corvi. He is well known at all the tables d'hôte where there are women, and where they have a healthy little game after dinner. I know him well too. He is a bad fellow who passes himself off as a former superior officer in the Italian army."

"His address?"

"He lives in the Rue de la Michodière, in a house occupied by a person who lets out furnished rooms. I went there. The concierge told me that my man had just gone out with an ill-looking individual, and that they would probably be found in a little café at the corner of the street. I hastened there, and sure enough, I found the two fellows drinking beer."

"Won't they give us the slip?"

"No danger of that; I have got them safe."

"How so?"

"Oh, an idea of mine. I just thought, 'Suppose they go off? And I at once went and warned some policeman, and returned and stationed myself near the café. It was just closing-time. My two fellows came out; I

picked a quarrel with them ; and now they are in the station-house well cared for."

The commissary knit his brows. "That's almost too much zeal," he murmured. "Well, what's done is done. Did you make any inquiries about the Saint-Pavin and Jottras matter?"

"I had no time it was too late. You forget perhaps, sir, that it is now past two o'clock."

As he finished speaking, the secretary who had been sent to the Rue de la Pépinière came in.

"Well?" inquired the commissary, not without evident anxiety.

"I waited for Madame de Thaller over an hour," he said. "When she came home I gave her the letter. She read it ; and in presence of a number of her servants, she handed me these two thousand francs."

At the sight of the bank-notes the commissary jumped to his feet. "Now we have it !" he exclaimed. "Here is the proof that we wanted."

IX.

It was past four o'clock when M. de Trégars was at last able to return home. He had minutely, and at length, arranged everything with the commissary ; he had endeavoured to anticipate every eventuality. His line of conduct was perfectly well marked out, and he carried with him the certainty that on the day which was about to dawn the strange game that he was playing would be finally won or lost.

"At last, here you are, sir !" exclaimed his faithful servant when he reached home.

It was doubtless anxiety that had kept the old man up all night ; but so absorbed was Marius's mind, that he scarcely noticed the fact. "Did any one call in my absence?" he asked.

"Yes sir. A gentleman called during the evening, M. Costeclar, who appeared very much vexed not to find you in. He stated that he came on a very important matter that you would know all about ; and he requested me to ask you to wait for him to-morrow, that is to-day, until twelve o'clock."

Was M. Costeclar sent by M. de Thaller? Had the manager of the Mutual Credit Bank changed his mind? and had he decided to accept the conditions which he had at first rejected? In that case it was too late. It was no longer in the power of any human being to suspend the action of justice. Without giving any further thought to the visit, M. de Trégars said : "I am worn out with fatigue, and I am going to lie down. You must call me at eight o'clock precisely."

But it was in vain that he tried to find a short respite in sleep. For forty-eight hours his mind had been taxed beyond measure, his nerves had been wrought up to an almost intolerable degree of exaltation. As soon as he closed his eyes it was with a merciless precision that his imagination presented to him all the events which had taken place since that afternoon in the Place Royale when he had ventured to declare his love to Mademoiselle Gilberte. Who could have told him then that he would engage in that struggle, the issue of which must certainly be some abominable scandal in which his name would be involved? Who could have told him, that gradually and by the very force of circumstances, he would be led to overcome his repugnance, and to rival the ruses and the tortuous combinations

of the wretches he was trying to reach? But he was not of those who once engaged, regret, hesitate, and draw back. His conscience reproached him with nothing. It was for justice and right that he was battling; and Mademoiselle Gilberte was the prize that would reward him. As eight o'clock struck his servant came in.

"Run for a cab," he said, "I shall be ready in a moment."

He was ready, in fact when the old servant returned; and as he had in his pocket some of those arguments that lend wings to the worst cab-horses, in less than ten minutes he had reached the Hôtel des Folies. "How is Mademoiselle Lucienne?" he inquired first of all of the worthy hostess.

"The poor dear child is much better," answered Madame Fortin; "and the doctor, who has just left now feels sure of her recovery. But there is a row up there."

"A row?"

"Yes. That lady whom my husband went after last night insists upon going out, and M. Maxence won't let her; so that they are quarrelling up there. Just listen."

The loud noise of a violent altercation could be heard distinctly. M. de Trégars started up stairs, and on the second-floor landing he found Maxence holding on obstinately to the baluster, whilst Madame Zélie Cadelle, redder than a peony, was trying to force him to let her pass, treating him at the same time to some of the choicest epithets of her well-stocked repertory.

"Is it you," she cried, catching sight of Marius, "who gave orders to keep me here against my wish? By what right? Am I your prisoner?"

To further irritate her would have been imprudent. "Why did you wish to leave," asked M. de Trégars gently, "at the very moment when you knew that I was to call for you?"

"Why don't you tell the truth?" she said interrupting him, and shrugging her shoulders. "Own that you are afraid to trust me."

"Oh!"

"You were wrong! What I promise to do, I do. I only wanted to go home to dress. Can I go out in the street in this costume?" And she spread out her wrapper, all faded and stained.

"I have a cab below," said Marius. "No one will see us."

Doubtless she understood that it was useless to hesitate. "As you please then," she said.

M. de Trégars took Maxence aside, and in a hurried whisper, said: "You must go at once to the Rue St. Gilles, and in my name request your sister to accompany you. You will take a closed cab and go and wait in the Rue St. Lazare, opposite No. 25. It is possible that Gilberte's assistance may become indispensable to me. And as Lucienne must not be left alone, you had better ask Madame Fortin to go and stay with her." And without waiting for an answer, he requested Madame Cadelle to take her seat in the cab.

They started; but the young woman was far from being in her usual spirits. It was clear that she bitterly regretted having gone so far, and not having been able to escape at the last moment. As the cab drove on, she became very pale, and a frown appeared upon her face. "All the same," she began; "it's a nasty thing I am about to do."

"Do you repent then, assisting me to punish your friend's would-be assassins?" asked M. de Trégars.

"I know very well that old Vincent is a scoundrel," she said shaking her head; "but he trusted me, and I am betraying him."

"You are mistaken, madame. To furnish me with the means of speaking to M. Favoral is not to betray him; and I shall do everything in my power to enable him to escape the police, and make his way abroad."

"What a joke!"

"It is the exact truth; I give you my word of honour."

She appeared reassured; and as the cab turned into the Rue St. Lazare, she said: "Let us stop here."

"Why?"

"So that I can buy old Vincent's breakfast. He can't go out to eat, of course; and so I have to take all his meals in to him."

Marius's mistrust was far from being dissipated; and yet he did not think it prudent to refuse, promising, however, not to lose sight of Madame Zélie. He followed her, therefore, to the baker's and the pork-butcher's; and when she had made her purchases, they entered the house of modest appearance where she had her apartments,

As they were going up-stairs, the concierge ran out of his lodge. "Madame!" he called, "madame!"

Madame Cadelle stopped. "What is the matter?"

"A letter for you."

"For me?"

"Here it is. A lady brought it about five minutes ago. Really she looked awfully annoyed not to find you in. But she is coming back. She knew you were to be here this morning."

M. de Trégars had also stopped. "What was she like, this lady?" he asked.

"Dressed all in black, with a thick veil over her face."

The concierge returned to his lodge. Madame Zélie broke the seal. The first envelope contained another, upon which she spelt, for she did not read very fluently: "To be handed to M. Vincent."

"Some one knows that he is hiding here," she said in a tone of utter surprise. "Who can it be?"

"Who? Why, the woman whose reputation M. Favoral was so anxious to spare when he installed you in the house in the Rue du Cirque."

"You are right," she said. "What a fool he made of me, the old rascal! But never mind. I am going to pay him out for it now."

Nevertheless, when she reached the door of her apartments and at the moment of slipping the key into the keyhole, she hesitated. "If some misfortune should happen," she sighed.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Old Vincent has got all sorts of arms in there. He swore to me that the first person who forced his way into his room he would kill like a dog. Suppose he should fire on us?" She was afraid, terribly afraid; she was ghastly pale, and her teeth chattered.

"Let me enter first," suggested M. de Trégars.

"No. Only if you were a good fellow, you would do what I am going to ask you. Say, will you?"

"If it can be done."

"Oh, certainly! This is it. We'll go in together; but you must not make any noise. There is a large closet with glass doors, from which everything can be heard and seen that goes on in the principal-room. You'll get in there. I'll go and draw old Vincent out of his bedroom, and at the right moment you can appear."

"Agreed!" said Marius.

"Then," she said, "everything will go on all right. The entrance of the closet with the glass doors is on the right as you go in. Come along now, and walk softly." And she opened the door.

In the dark and narrow ante-chamber, were three doors, that of the dining-room on the left; that of the drawing-room in the centre; and on the right, that of the closet. M. de Trégars entered noiselessly the latter, and at once recognized that Madame Zélie had not deceived him, and that he would be able to see and hear everything that went on in the drawing-room. He saw the young woman lay her provisions down upon the table, and then heard her call: "Vincent!"

The former cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank appeared at once, coming out of the bedroom. He was so changed that his wife and children would have hesitated in recognizing him. He had cut off his beard, pulled out almost the whole of his thick eyebrows, and hidden his coarse straight hair under a brown wig. He wore patent-leather boots, baggy trousers, and one of those short jackets of rough material, and with broad sleeves, which French elegance has borrowed from English stable-boys. He tried to appear calm, careless, and playful; but the contraction of his lips betrayed a horrible anguish, and his eyes had the strange mobility of a wild beast. "I was beginning to fear that you would disappoint me," he said to Madame Zélie.

"It took me some time to buy your breakfast."

"And is that all that kept you?"

"The concierge detained me too, to hand me a letter, in which I found one for you. Here it is."

"A letter!" exclaimed Vincent Favoral. And snatching it from her he tore off the envelope. But he had scarcely looked over it, when he crushed it in his hand, exclaiming: "It is monstrous! It is a mean infamous treason!"

He was interrupted by a violent ringing of the door-bell. "Who can it be?" stammered Madame Cadelle.

"I know who it is," replied the former cashier. "Open, open quick."

She obeyed; and almost immediately there entered the drawing-room a woman wearing a cheap black woollen dress. With a sudden gesture she threw off her veil, and M. de Trégars recognized the Baroness de Thaller. "Leave us!" she said to Madame Zélie, in a tone which one would hardly dare to assume towards a servant.

"What, what!" said the other highly indignant, "I am at home here."

"Leave us!" repeated M. Favoral threateningly. "Go, go!"

She went out, but only to take refuge by the side of M. de Trégars.

"You hear how they treat me!" she said in a hoarse voice.

He made no answer. All his attention was centred upon the occupants of the drawing-room. The Baroness de Thaller and the former cashier were standing opposite each other like two adversaries about to fight a duel. "I have just read your letter," at length began Vincent Favoral.

"Ah!" said the baroness coldly.

"It is a joke, I suppose."

"Not at all."

"You refuse to go with me?"

"Positively."

"And yet it was all agreed upon. I have acted wholly under your urgent, pressing advice. How many times have you told me that to live

with your husband had become an intolerable torment to you ! How many times have you sworn to me that you wished to be mine alone, begging me to procure a large sum of money, and to fly with you !”

“I was in earnest at the time. I have discovered, at the last moment, that it would be impossible for me thus to abandon my country, my daughter, my friends.”

“We can take Césarine with us.”

“Do not insist.”

He was looking at her with a stupid, gloomy gaze. “Then,” he stammered, “those tears, those prayers, those oaths, meant nothing !”

“I have reflected.”

“It is not possible ! If you spoke the truth, you would not be here.”

“I am here to make you understand that we must give up projects which cannot be realized. There are certain social conventionalities which cannot be ignored.”

As if he scarcely understood what she said, he repeated : “Social conventionalities !” And then, suddenly falling at Madame de Thaller’s feet, with his head thrown back, and his hands clasped together, he exclaimed : “It is not true. Confess that you lie, and that it is a final trial which you are imposing upon me. Or else have you, then, never loved me ? It is impossible ! I would not believe you, if you were to say so. A woman who does not love a man cannot be to him what you have been to me ; she does not give herself up thus so joyously and so completely. Have you, then, forgotten everything ? Is it possible that you no longer remember those divine evenings passed in the Rue du Cirque—those nights, the mere thought of which fires my brain, and consumes my blood ?” He was horrible to look at, horrible and ridiculous at the same time. As he wished to take hold of Madame de Thaller’s hands, she stepped back, and he followed her, dragging himself on his knees. “Where could you find,” he continued, “a man who worships you like I do, with an ardent, absolute, blind, mad passion ? With what can you reproach me ? Have I not sacrificed to you, without a murmur, everything that a man can sacrifice here below, fortune, family, honour. To supply your extravagance, to anticipate your slightest fancies, to give you gold to scatter by the handful, have I not kept my wife and children in poverty ? I would have snatched the bread from their mouths in order to purchase roses to scatter under your feet. And for years did ever a word from me betray the secret of our love ? What have I not endured ? You deceived me, I knew it, and I said nothing. Upon a word from you I stepped aside before him whom your caprice made happy for a day. You said to me, ‘Steal !’ and I stole. You said to me, ‘Kill !’ and I tried to kill.”

He seized hold of one of her hands, but she quickly withdrew it from his grasp, and in a tone of insupportable disgust she exclaimed, “Oh ! enough !”

Behind the glass door of the closet, Marius felt Madame Zélie Cadelle shudder beside him. “What a wretch that woman is,” she murmured, “and he, what a coward !”

The wretched man remained grovelling on the floor. “And you wish to abandon me,” he groaned, “when we are united by a past such as ours ! How can you replace me ? Where will you find a slave more devoted to your will, than I ?”

“Cease,” interrupted the baroness, overcome with impatience, “cease these ridiculous and useless pleadings.”

At these words he rose to his feet as though he had received a stroke from a whip. "What is to become of me, then?" he asked.

"Fly. A man who has twelve hundred thousand francs in gold, bank-notes, and good securities, can always get along."

"And my wife and children?"

"Maxence is old enough to help his mother. Gilberte will find a husband, you may be sure. Besides, what's to prevent you from sending them money?"

"They would refuse it."

"You will always be a fool, my dear!"

To Vincent Favoral's first stupor and miserable weakness now succeeded a terrible rage. All the blood had left his face; his eyes were flashing.

"Then," he resumed, "all is really over?"

"Of course."

"Then I have been duped like the rest, like that poor Marquis de Trégars, whom you made mad also. But he, at least, saved his honour; whereas I— And I have no excuse; for I should have known better. I knew that you were but the bait the Baron de Thaller held out to his victims."

He waited for an answer; but she maintained a contemptuous silence.

"Then you think," he said with a threatening laugh, "that it will all end like this."

"What can you do?"

"There is such a thing as justice, I imagine, and judges too. I can give myself up, and reveal everything."

She shrugged her shoulders. "That would be throwing yourself into the wolf's mouth for nothing," she said. "You know better than any one else that our precautions are well enough taken to defy anything you can do or say. I have nothing to fear."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Trust to me," she said with a smile of perfect security.

"Well, we will see," said the former cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank, with a terrible gesture. And double locking the door which communicated with the ante-chamber, he put the key in his pocket; and, with a step as stiff and mechanical as that of an automaton, he disappeared into the bedroom.

"He is gone for a weapon," whispered Madame Cadelle.

It was also what Marius thought. "Run down-stairs quick," he said to her. "In a cab standing opposite No. 25, you will find Mademoiselle Gilberte Favoral waiting. Tell her to come at once." And rushing into the drawing-room, "Fly!" he said to Madame de Thaller. But she remained as though petrified by this apparition. "M. de Trégars!"

"Yes, yes, me. But make haste and go!" And he pushed her into the closet.

It was but time. Vincent Favoral reappeared upon the threshold of the bedroom. But, if it was a weapon he had gone for, it was not of the sort which Marius and Madame Cadelle supposed. It was a bundle of documents which he held in his hand. Seeing M. de Trégars instead of Madame de Thaller, an exclamation of terror and surprise rose to his lips. "Ah the miserable wretch!" he stammered with a tongue made thick by passion, "the infamous wretch! She has betrayed me; I am lost!"

"No, no! you are not lost," said M. de Trégars, mastering the most terrible emotion he had ever felt.

Collecting all the energy that the devouring passion which had wasted his existence had left him, the former cashier took a step or two forward. "Who are you, then!" he asked.

"Do you not know me? I am the son of that unfortunate Marquis de Trégars of whom you were speaking a moment since. I am Lucienne's brother."

Like a man who has received a heavy blow, Vincent Favoral sank upon a chair. "He knows all," he groaned.

"Yes, all!"

"You must hate me mortally."

"I pity you."

The old cashier had reached that point when all the faculties, after being strained to their utmost limits, suddenly break down, when the strongest man gives up, and weeps like a child. "Ah, I am the greatest of villains!" exclaimed he. He hid his face in his hands; and in one second,—as it happens, so 'tis said, to the dying on the threshold of eternity,—he reviewed all his past existence. "And yet," he resumed, "I had not the soul of a villain. I wanted to get rich, but honestly, by labour, and by rigid economy. And I should have succeeded. I had a hundred and fifty thousand francs of my own when I met the Baron de Thaller. Alas! why did I meet him? It was he who first gave me to understand that it was stupid to work and to save, when, at the Bourse, with moderate luck, one might become a millionaire in six months." He stopped, shook his head, and suddenly asked: "Do you know the Baron de Thaller?" But without giving Marius time to answer, he continued: "He is a German, a Prussian. His father was a cab-driver in Berlin, and his mother waiting-maid in a brewery. At the age of eighteen he was compelled to leave his country, owing to some petty swindle, and came to take up his residence in Paris. He found employment in the office of a stock-broker, and was living very poorly, when he made the acquaintance of a young laundress named Euphrasie, who had for a lover a very wealthy nobleman, the Marquis de Trégars, whose weakness was to pass himself off for a poor clerk. Euphrasie and De Thaller were born to agree. They did agree, and formed an association, she contributing her beauty, he his genius for intrigue, both their corruption and their vices. Soon after they met, she gave birth to a child, a daughter, whom she intrusted to some poor gardeners at Louveciennes, with the firm and settled intention of leaving her there forever. And yet it was upon this daughter, whom they firmly hoped never to see again, that the two accomplices were building their fortune. It was in the name of this daughter that Euphrasie extorted considerable sums from the Marquis de Trégars. As soon as De Thaller and she found themselves in possession of six hundred thousand francs, they dismissed the marquis, and got married. Already, at that time, De Thaller had taken the title of baron, and lived in some style. But his first speculations were not successful. The revolution of 1848 finished his ruin, and he was on the point of being posted up at the Bourse, when I crossed his path, I, poor fool, who was going about everywhere, inquiring how I could advantageously invest my hundred and fifty thousand francs." He spoke in a hoarse voice, and shook his clenched fist in the air, doubtless at the Baron de Thaller. "Unfortunately," he resumed, "it was only much later that I discovered all this. At the time, M. de Thaller dazzled me. His friends, Saint-Pavin and the bankers Jottras, proclaimed him the smartest and the most honest man in France. Still, I would not have entrusted my money to him, if it had not been for

the baroness. The first time that I was introduced to her, and that she fixed upon me her great black eyes, I felt myself moved to the inmost recesses of my soul. In order to see her again, I invited her, together with her husband and her husband's friends, to dine with me, by the side of my wife and children. She came. Her husband got me to sign everything he pleased ; but, as she went off, she squeezed my hand." The wretched man shuddered at the recollection of it. "The next day," he continued, "I handed to De Thaller all that I had in the world ; and, in exchange, he gave me the position of chief cashier in the Mutual Credit Bank, which he had just established. He treated me like an inferior, and did not admit me to visit his family. But I didn't care, the baroness had permitted me to see her again, and almost every afternoon I met her in the Tuileries Gardens ; and I had even told her that I loved her desperately. At last, one afternoon, she consented to pass an evening with me, in an apartment which I had rented. The day before I was to meet her, and whilst I was beside myself with joy, the Baron de Thaller asked me to assist him, by means of certain irregular entries, to conceal a deficit arising from unsuccessful speculations. How could I refuse to help a man whom, as I thought, I was about to deceive basely ! I did as he wished. The next day Madame de Thaller became my mistress, and I was a lost man."

Was he trying to exculpate himself ? Was he merely yielding to that imperious instigation more powerful than the will or reason, which incites the criminal to reveal the secret which oppresses him ?

"From that day," he resumed, "began for me the torment of that double existence which I underwent for years. I gave to my mistress all I had in the world ; and she was insatiable. She wanted money always, any way, and in heaps. She made me buy the house in the Rue du Cirque for our meetings ; and, between the demands of the husband and those of the wife, I almost went mad. I drew from the funds of the Mutual Credit Bank as from an inexhaustible mine ; and, as I foresaw that a day must come when all would be discovered, I always carried about me a loaded revolver, with which to blow out my brains whenever the police came to arrest me." And he showed Marius the handle of a revolver protruding from his pocket. "If only she had been faithful to me !" he continued, becoming more and more animated. "But what have I not endured ! When the Marquis de Trégars returned to Paris, and they set about defrauding him of his fortune, she did not hesitate a moment to become his mistress again. She would say to me, 'What a fool you are ! all I want is his money. I love no one but you.' But after his death she took others. Our house in the Rue du Cirque became a place of debauchery for herself and her daughter Césarine. And I, miserable coward that I was ! I submitted to it all, so much did I tremble to lose her, so much did I fear to be denied even the semblance of love with which she repaid my fearful sacrifices. And to-day she would betray me, forsake me ! For everything that has taken place was suggested by her in order to procure a sum wherewith to fly to America. It was she who imagined the vile comedy which I played, so as to throw upon myself the whole responsibility. M. de Thaller has had millions for his share ; I have only had twelve hundred thousand francs." Violent nervous shudders shook his frame ; his face became almost purple. He drew himself up, and, brandishing the letters which he held in his hand, he exclaimed : "But all is not over ! There are proofs which neither the baron nor his wife know that I have ! I have the proof of the infamous swindle of which the Marquis de Trégars was the victim."

I have the proof of the farce played by M. de Thaller and myself to defraud the shareholders of the Mutual Credit Bank !”

“What do you intend to do ?” asked Marius.

He laughed stupidly. “I ? I shall go and hide myself in some suburb of Paris, and write to Euphrasie to join me. She knows that I have twelve hundred thousand francs, and she will come. She will keep coming as long as I have any money, and when I have no more—” But he suddenly stopped, and started back, outstretching his arms as if to repel a terrifying apparition. Mademoiselle Gilberte had just entered the room. “My daughter !” he stammered, “Gilberte !”

“Soon to be the Marchioness de Trégars,” said Marius.

An inexpressible look of terror and anguish convulsed Vincent Favoral's features ; he guessed that it was the end. “What do you want with me ?” he asked.

“The money that you have stolen, father,” replied the young girl in an inexorable tone of voice, “the twelve hundred thousand francs which you have here, then the proofs which are in your hands, and, finally, your weapons.”

“Take away my money !” he said, trembling from head to foot. “Why, that would be compelling me to give myself up ! Do you wish to see me a convict ?”

“The disgrace would also fall upon your children, sir,” said M. de Trégars. “We shall, on the contrary, do everything possible to enable you to evade the pursuit of the police.”

“Well, yes, then ! But to-morrow I must write to Euphrasie, I must see her !”

“You do not know what you say, father,” said Mademoiselle Gilberte. “Come, do as I ask you.”

He drew himself up to his full height. “And suppose I refuse ?”

But it was the last effort of his will. He yielded, though not without an agonizing struggle, and gave up to his daughter the money, the proofs, and the arms. And as she was about to leave, leaning on M. de Trégars's arm, he murmured imploringly : “Send me your mother. She will understand me, she will not be without pity. She is my wife ; let her come quick. I will not, I cannot remain alone.”

X.

It was with convulsive haste that the Baroness de Thaller traversed the distance that separated the Rue St. Lazare from the Rue de la Pépinière. M. de Trégars's sudden intervention had upset all her ideas. The most sinister presentiments agitated her mind. In the courtyard of her residence, all the servants, gathered in a group, were talking. They did not take the trouble to stand aside to let her pass ; and she even noticed some smiles and ironical gigglings. This was a terrible blow to her. What was happening ? What had they heard ? A man was sitting in the magnificent vestibule as she entered. It was the same suspicious character that Marius de Trégars had seen in the principal drawing-room, in mysterious conference with the baroness.

“Bad news,” he said with a pitiful look.

“What ?”

“That minx, Lucienne, must have her soul riveted to her body. She is only wounded ; and she'll get over it.”

"Never mind Lucienne. What about M. de Trégars?"

"Oh! he's a sharp one. Instead of taking up our man's provocation, he collared him, and found in his pocket the note I had sent him."

Madame de Thaller started violently. "What is the meaning, then," she asked, "of your letter of last night, in which you requested me to hand two thousand francs to the bearer?"

The man became ghastly pale. "You received a letter from me," he stammered, "last night?"

"Yes, from you; and I gave the money."

The man struck his forehead. "I understand it all!" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"They wanted proofs. They imitated my handwriting, and you swallowed the bait. That's why I was locked up in the station-house all night; and, if they released me this morning, it was to find out where I'd go. I have been followed. The game is up, baroness. Every one for himself now!" And he ran out.

More agitated than ever, Madame de Thaller went upstairs. In the little drawing-room, she found the Baron de Thaller and Mademoiselle Césarine waiting for her. Stretched upon an arm-chair, her legs crossed, and the tip of her boot on a level with her eye, Mademoiselle Césarine, with a look of ironical curiosity, was watching her father, who, livid and trembling with nervous excitement, was walking up and down, like a wild beast in its cage.

"Things are going badly," said he, as soon as the baroness appeared, "very badly. Our game is devilishly compromised."

"You think so?"

"I am but too sure of it. Such a well-combined stroke too! But everything is against us. In presence of the investigating magistrate, Jottras held out well; but Saint-Pavin spoke. The dirty rascal was not satisfied with the share allotted to him. On the information furnished by him, Costeclar was arrested this morning. And Costeclar knows all, since he has been your confidant, Vincent Favoral's, and my own. When a man has, like him, two or three forgeries in his record, he is sure to speak. Perhaps he has already done so, since the police have called on Lattermann, with whom I had organized the panic and the fall of the Mutual Credit Bank stock. What can we do to ward off the blow?"

With a surer glance than her husband, Madame de Thaller had measured the situation. "Do not try to ward it off," she replied, "it would be useless."

"Because?"

"Because M. de Trégars has found Vincent Favoral; because, at this very moment, they are together, arranging their plans."

The baron made a terrible gesture. "Ah, thunder and lightning!" he exclaimed. "I always told you that that stupid fool, Favoral, would cause our ruin. It was so easy for you to find an opportunity for him to blow his brains out."

"Was it so difficult for you to accept M. de Trégars's offers?"

"It was you who made me refuse."

"Was it me, too, who was so anxious to get rid of Lucienne?"

For years, Mademoiselle Césarine had not felt so amused; and, in a half whisper, she hummed to herself one of her favourite tunes. At this moment there was a violent knocking at the door.

"In the name of the law!"

It was a commissary of police, with warrants to arrest the Baron and Baroness de Thaller. And, whilst surrounded by agents, they were taken to a cab, Mademoiselle Césarine exclaimed : "Orphan on both sides ! Now I am free, and we'll have some fun !"

At that very moment, M. de Trégars and Mademoiselle Gilberte reached the Rue St. Gilles. Hearing that her husband had been found, Madame Favoral insisted upon seeing him at once. And, in spite of anything they could tell her, she threw a shawl over her shoulders, and started with Mademoiselle Gilberte. When they entered Madame Zélie's drawing-room, they saw Vincent Favoral sitting at a table with his back towards them, and apparently writing. Madame Favoral approached on tiptoe, and read over her husband's shoulder what he had just written : "Euphrasie, my beloved, my eternally adored mistress, will you forgive me? The money that I was keeping for you, my darling, the proofs which will crush your husband—they have taken everything from me, basely, by force. And it is my daughter—" He had stopped there.

"Vincent !" called Madame Favoral, surprised at his immobility.

He made no answer. She touched him with her finger. He rolled to the ground. He was dead !

Three months later the great Mutual Credit Bank suit was tried before the sixth Court. The scandal was great ; but public curiosity was strangely disappointed. As in most of these financial affairs, justice, whilst exposing the most audacious frauds, was not able to unravel the true secret. The money, however, that the Baron de Thaller had hoped to save was all recovered. That worthy was condemned to five years' imprisonment ; M. Costeclar got off with three years ; and M. Jottras with two. M. Saint-Pavin was acquitted. Arrested for subornation of murder, the former Marchioness de Javelle, the Baroness de Thaller, was released for want of sufficient proof. But, implicated in the suit against her husband, she lost three-fourths of her personal fortune, and is now living with her daughter, whose first appearance is announced to take place shortly at a well-known theatre.

Mademoiselle Lucienne, completely restored, married Maxence Favoral. Of the five hundred thousand francs which were returned to her, she applied three hundred thousand towards discharging part of her father-in-law's debts, and with the rest she induced her husband to emigrate. Paris had become odious to them both.

Marius and Mademoiselle Gilberte, who is now the Marchioness de Trégars, have taken up their residence at the Château de Trégars, three leagues from Quimper. They have been followed in their retreat by Madame Favoral and the Count de Villegré. The greater portion of his father's fortune, Marius has applied to pay off all the personal creditors of the former cashier of the Mutual Credit Bank, all the trades-people, and also M. Chapelain, M. Désormeaux, and M. and Madame Desclavettes. All that is left to the Marquis and Marchioness de Trégars is some twenty thousand francs a year, and if they ever lose them, it will not be at the Bourse.

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